

# The Starling

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JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS





Louis Pickett

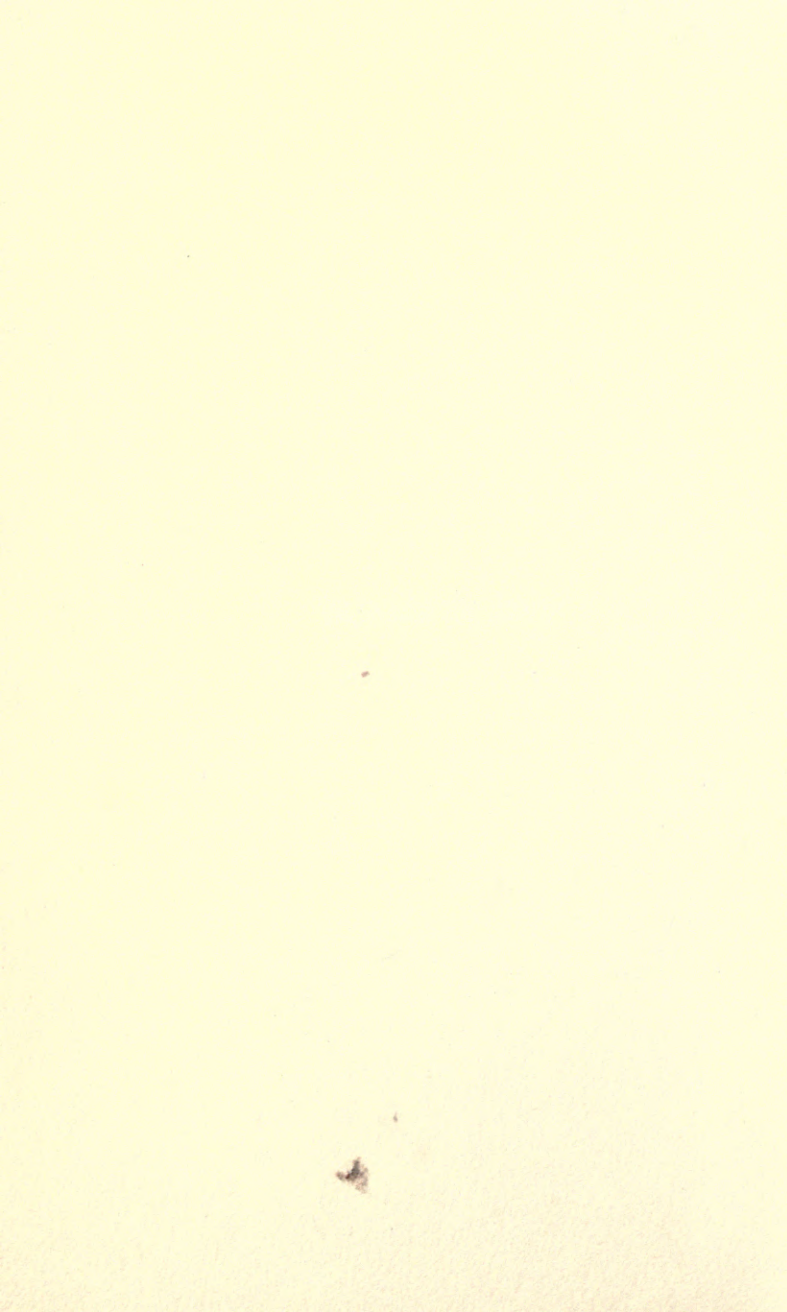
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**THE STARLING**









Sarah held herself very still, waiting.

# THE STARLING

*By*

JULIET WILBOR TOMPKINS

AUTHOR OF

The Seed of the Righteous, A Girl Named Mary  
At the Sign of the Oldest House, Etc.

*"I can't get out—I can't get out," said the starling*  
—STERNE

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN ALONZO WILLIAMS

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# THE STARLING

## 1

**T**HE little Sarah, hovering at the gap in the hedge, had hotly wondered if any one wanted anything on earth as she wanted company. She always saw it as a bright tide, pouring in past the green barrier to spread over the lawn and leap up the steps, streaming through the silent house, even into the sacred library, filling the air with laughing sounds, and, when it retreated, leaving some glorious little visitor up in her own room, that they might whisper, whisper, half the night, with smothered giggles and a pretense of silence when a maternal hand thumped the wall. Sarah composed notes of invitation, set imaginary tea tables, dramatized wild games with the piano at full blast, candy pulls, charades, pillow fights—little girls who walked with their arms about her, boys who last-tagged her on the steps—oh, loving, riotous, high-hearted Company! Spent with excitement, she would fling herself upon her

mother: "Couldn't I have just three little girls in to supper?" And always the same apologetic, half whispered answer:

"You know, dear, it does disturb your father!" Her strange little mother feared most things—spiders, cows, boats, tramps, dogs, wind, elevators, the dark—until it was a wonder that she had the sheer heroism to live; but above all she feared disturbing Mr. Cawthorne.

Sarah had a generous imagination. If an aunt sent her a postal card and she had ice-cream at dinner, she would go to bed feeling that the day had been rich with event. "A great deal happens to me!" she often told her mother, with the sudden shine in her eyes that made older people lay kind hands on her. And so she saw the old place as offering a thousand unsuspected joys to company, if once it got past the ungracious barrier of the hedge.

How Sarah hated the hedge!—a solid ever-green rampart twenty feet high, clipped to a hard squared evenness, with here and there a patch of dead brown in its gloomy side, always smelling of dust, tasting of dust when one nipped off a fat green tip in passing, and keeping the ground in its shadow stark and deso-

late. Neighbors pointed it out to strangers with the California pride in mere size, but the strangers shivered, especially if it was a gray day. Two giant eucalyptus trees dripped their heavy leaves like slants of rain over the entrance, and the dark mansard of the house was all that could be seen. The radiant garden, the old croquet hoops in the grass and the pepper trees full of natural cradles would never have been suspected from the outside. And the roses that had once softened the very mansard with their high sprays had been cut away, as their tapping and their nesting birds disturbed Mr. Cawthorne.

Sarah was eleven—a slender little girl with stick legs and a pale, delicately in-curved face slipped like a crescent moon between two long falls of dark hair—when the first miracle happened. There were to be three in her life, and the later ones had more obvious consequences, but none could match the astonished ecstasy this first one brought, or the revelations that it left behind.

It was Saturday afternoon, and some tradition that Saturday afternoon is a time of companioned pleasures must come down in the



blood of little girls, for it always roused an ache of dreams and desires. Sarah was hidden away in a curve of the gravel drive, trying to comfort herself with poppy-shows. To make poppy-shows, punch half a dozen holes, thumb deep, in gravel or soft earth, set in the bottom of each a little pink rose or a tuft of heliotrope or any bit of garden loveliness; cover with a fragment of glass, dust the whole over with gravel, then rub a small space clear and look in. The effect is fairylike, mysterious, beautiful. But, of course, the real charm lies in having some one else to make rival poppy-shows, and to exchange looks. Sarah composed half of hers in the name of Ethel Alice, an imaginary cousin. She was flat on her stomach with her eye glued to a particularly happy combination of blue lobelia and white jasmine—Ethel Alice's—when her mother came hurrying in search of her. She was a sweet, soft little woman with something girlish and eager about her, something scattering and hazy and lovingly kind; only her back was so frail that she always had to be doing things to ease it, and she was so easily frightened that Sarah gave a "Whoo-oo!" at the sound of her step, to spare her a startled

jump. She jumped, nevertheless, coming on her child's prostrate body, then laughed at her foolishness as she dropped down on the grass. Mothers as a rule can not fold up easily, and require chairs, but Sarah's could curl down like a child or a cat. She braced an arm across her back, the fingers hooked into the other elbow, but she was thinking only of the news that glowed in her face.

"Darling," she said, "something nice is going to happen!" They beamed at each other with the good news hovering between them like a shining bird, ready to burst into song. "A week from to-day," she went on, deliciously prolonging the thrill, "you are going to put on your best white dress—no, you shall have a new one!"

"With a pink sash?" Sarah burst in.

"With a pink sash. And you shall stand by the door and welcome"—the song was beginning to trill—"as many nice girls and boys as we can find!"

"Mother! A party!" Sarah's voice sang out so gloriously that Mrs. Cawthorne put up a warning hand, and they smothered their laughter in an embrace. "But father—!" Sarah whispered.

"He is going away, dear, overnight. They want him to speak down at Palo Alto Saturday evening, and he can't get back."

"What got him to do it?" Sarah marveled; but she could not stop for explanations. "Oh, mother, company—my company!" she cried. "Can we play games?"

"All you like."

"And have things to eat?"

"Ice-cream and cake and candy and lemonade—" They had to embrace again.

"And make a noise?"

"Raise the roof!"

"Oh, mother!" Sarah looked as if she were going up in rockets and Roman candles, and a touch of trouble stilled her mother.

"But we can't have things different when your father is home, darling," she urged, as if some one had accused her. "I tried to have parties when we were first married—my back wasn't so poor then, and I had more spirit; but it wasn't any use. It made him miserable, and that made me miserable, and I don't think the guests had a very good time!" She laughed, a gay, frank little laugh, as young as Sarah's. "There's no use doing things for happiness if



you don't get happiness out of them," she concluded comfortably. "Now let us make a list of the guests."

They wrote down twenty, chance acquaintances or children of old family friends. There were no schoolmates, for Mr. Cawthorne had theories about education, which he regarded as an affair solely of the intellect. Sarah at her books was a credit to his system of governesses and tutors, and he had never seen Sarah hovering at the gap in the hedge, aching with her great desire. The twenty, however, satisfied her gloriously, and the notes were sent about that afternoon by the gardener. Mr. Cawthorne would not have a telephone.

So began the most purely exquisite week that any one ever lived. The twenty accepted with a promptness that suggested an outside desire to get inside the hedge. Mrs. Cawthorne never expected or wanted to talk about anything but the party, and she listened to all Sarah's proposals with the promising openness of a fairy godmother. The very secrecy of their plans and preparations added flavor—for there was no sense in making Mr. Cawthorne think that he was going to be disturbed.

"Of course, I would not keep anything from him that he ought to know," Mrs. Cawthorne occasionally said, in one of her spasmodic attempts to act like a parent. "You understand that, Bunny dear!" And Bunny obliviously nodded away the interruption. It had not yet occurred to her to question their general household law.

By Tuesday night it seemed to Sarah that she could not—literally, physically, could not—wait for Saturday. Already the old house was peopled for her with flitting presences; a bright maze of game and laughter was continually weaving before her eyes. Lessons proved so impossible that they were given up—unobtrusively, in order not to worry Mr. Cawthorne; and Miss Wright, the governess, put in her time hunting favors and decorations and gifts for prizes. They could count on two free half mornings while Mr. Cawthorne was at the University, dealing with the Origin and Growth of the Romance Dialects. In one of these the piano was tuned, and the other saw a general rush of housecleaning. When Friday came, Mrs. Cawthorne was talking party from a couch, where she lay very flat, and the circles

under her eyes looked as if they had been dug out by a heavy thumb; but her radiant interest never faltered. According to all the laws of little-girl nature, Sarah ought to have been unbearably cross by that time; but she was only shiningly still instead of suppressedly noisy. And then, at dinner-time, the library door opened to let out trouble. Black frost never fell more blightingly on a rosy garden. Word came that Mr. Cawthorne's head had begun to ache, and that he would have only a cup of tea.

The very maid who brought the word looked pale. Mr. Cawthorne's headaches were rare, but they lasted twenty-four hours, darkening and hushing the house like a dreary enchantment. He would do nothing for them, asked nothing but the quintessence of his beloved silence. Mrs. Cawthorne met the news with a feeble murmur that it might pass off in the night, but Sarah, after a stunned moment, hid the wreck of her dreams in her elbow and stumbled out of the room. The sound that came back from her flight made the two women stare at each other in the human equality of grief.

"The pore child!" said Nelly, ready to cry herself; but Mrs. Cawthorne's look was suddenly fierce.

"She has got to have it!" she said under her breath.

She herself had headaches weekly, sometimes daily, and took reckless powders for them. She knew the danger to one's heart, but she had long ago learned to look on her body as a hopelessly poor thing, to be patched up any old way, and not bothered about more than necessary. Her spirit flew just above it and let it follow as it could. She who feared all the little harmless creatures, every kind of safe adventure, could have faced death and judgment any day with a friendly smile. She could not now tell her husband that Sarah must not have her heart broken, but she was quite ready to commit a crime to prevent it. Her hand did not falter; she was only glad that she had had the brilliant idea as she slipped one of her strongest powders into his cup of tea. She carried it to him herself.

"For, if it did hurt him, I don't want Nelly in any way involved," she thought composedly.

Then she waited, smiling a little, pleasantly hopeful, her hands holding up her back. In half an hour the library door opened again and Mr. Cawthorne came out. At a distance he did not look formidable—a small gray man with a



slight limp; it was only close up, when he smiled in his pointed beard, that one felt the power of his unchangeableness.

"I believe I'm going to weather it this time, Lisa," he said, rubbing eyes and brow with a slow hand. He had a slow, drawling, humorous voice, and students who cared little about Old French took his course for the famous bite of old Cawthorne's tongue. Because his fine eyes smiled, they believed that he was secretly kindly. "What did you do to that tea?" Mrs. Cawthorne jumped, but he was not looking at her. "Was it very strong or a new kind?" he added, sitting down at the table.

Her breath of relief came on a shake of secret laughter. "Both," she said.

"Well, it did me good. I think I can eat something."

She saw him supplied, then carried hope to Sarah, who came up out of despair at a single bound. Mrs. Cawthorne listened at her husband's door several times that night, and, hearing him breathe, always crept back to bed with a silent laugh. He was perfectly well in the morning, and mid-afternoon saw him set off.

The old mansard watched him pass the hedge,

then burst into activity all over at once. It seemed to be shouting a festal chorus as its furniture rolled from room to room and its walls and chandeliers took on festoons and blossoming branches. Miss Wright had come to help, the two maids and the gardener were all in it, for this was to look a party as well as be one, and there were games and jokes culled from magazines that needed elaborate planting. And then at last it was time to put on Sarah's new white dress and tie her pink sash, and the company was coming in through the hedge.

At first, Sarah was conscious only of terror. She gave her limp hand, but she was lost in a blurred confusion; trying to speak was like trying to scream in a nightmare—an agony of effort resulting in a dim hoarse squeak. Old acquaintances offered an easy, "Hello, Sarah!" and strangers smiled shyly into her face, giving her her chance; but the hedge seemed to have grown up about her soul, leaving no gap. The moment of greeting, instead of being a warm rushing together, was ending in a dismal shrinking apart, and a congealing stiffness threatened the party.

Help came from a tall blond boy who lounged

in after the rest and stood beside Sarah, looking on with an ease that was steadying.

"I dare say it's too much of a kid party for me," he explained, "but I can help you run things, and, if you have prizes, I won't win them—not many of them, anyway." His hands identified treasures in his pockets. "I'm Robert Russell, Jr., you know. My father is Doctor Russell, so I dare say that is why you asked me. Everybody knows him, of course. I suppose those chairs are for Going to Jerusalem. I know a better way to fix them—makes it harder—but you can do it this way if you like. I'm glad you're going to have games; I hate dancing. The girls' hair always gets in your mouth." He surprised a laugh out of her, a breathless gasp that seemed to open up the hedge, letting a gleam of the real Sarah shine through. Success was evidently a matter of course to him, but he drew up one shoulder, then the other, in a lordly approval of himself that included her.

"Want me to get things going?" he offered. "I am pretty good at that, usually. You see, I happen to know a lot of jokes and conundrums and things. I sort of pick them up. You never heard me do an Irish story, did you? Of course,

it's your party, not mine—I promised m'mother I'd remember that. But if you'd like me to tell one now—”

“Oh, if you would!” Sarah whispered.

He stepped out into the middle of the room, graceful, handsome, assured, and Sarah thought she had never seen any one so like a fairy-tale prince; not dreaming that she herself, stick legs and all, with her delicately crescent face uplifted between two falling curves of dark hair, would have made a delightful fairy-tale princess. From that moment the party was a success. The first laugh took the frost out of the air, and the program went with a swing.

It was very curious. All that bright evening Sarah felt the party going on about her, and yet she could not seem to get into it. Everything that she had dreamed came true for the others: they galloped through the games and found the concealed gifts and won the prizes in a glory of laughter and flying feet; but Sarah, breathless, smiling, frightened, seemed always to be following after, or standing alone, or grasping in vain for some speech to fling out as her confident guests flung their happy voices. If they would have clustered about her and

given her time, she felt that she could have done it—oh, splendidly! But they all knew their way and scampered along it, *sauve qui peut*. Sarah could have loved any one of them, but they had it settled whom they loved, and it was only their own good time that concerned them.

Robert Russell, Jr., assumed complete charge, led the games, ordered the children into line, made them laugh, yet checked them when they grew too uproarious, and held always the undisputed center. At intervals he came back to Sarah to explain his methods, and the burning admiration in her lifted face must have touched him, for he exchanged mottoes with her and told her that they did things very well at her house.

"Whenever you want any help with a party, I'll come," he offered. "You just tell me in plenty of time, for, of course, I'm asked a good deal. It's because I'm lively, I suppose."

She could show him herself. "I'm lively, too," she said in an eager whisper. "Inside I can be all jumping and dancing and making lovely jokes. But I don't know how to get it out."

That surprised him. "Why, you just—open your mouth," he decided.



Sarah opened it and he waited with interest, but only a rush of laughter came.

"Well, if you can laugh like that, you've got something to start on," he assured her. "I knew you weren't a stick. I said so."

The implication brought a wretched flush. Robert did not suspect what he had done, but a guest who stood near turned on him with cool patronage. She was a composed, efficient little pony of a girl, two years older than Sarah, with a glorious mass of red-gold curls and an odd white face that would have been handsome but for too pale eyelashes.

"Look here, Rob Russell, if you are going to be a doctor like your father, you'd better begin learning what to say and what not to," she instructed him.

Robert bristled. "I didn't say anything!"

"You are always saying things; and you never think how you'd like them yourself." The girl put her arm about Sarah, not affectionately—which might have saved the day—but with an air of standing by her sex, for which Sarah was faintly grateful. "You'll have an awfully poor bedside manner if you don't look out. I think Sarah is a duck," she added incisively.

"Well, so do I, smarty," said the injured Robert. "I'm going to dance the Virginia reel with her." He led Sarah to the head of the forming lines. "Dosey Warren does think she knows it all," he complained darkly as their ways separated.

Of all that difficult evening, it was the worst moment when Sarah set out alone from the top of the line to meet some one who undoubtedly advanced, but whom she could not see for fright. She had been rehearsed in the Virginia reel with her mother and Miss Wright and two rows of chairs and knew it perfectly that way, but Robert's dire word seemed to have paralyzed her faculties. She could only fumble through it, putting out always the wrong hand, feeling them all hurling "Stick!" at her from their cruel security. An Indian method of torture, pictured in one of her books, was humiliatingly vivid to her as she ran the gauntlet of her terrible guests. And this was her dream of Company!

No one else saw. Her mother, flattened back now in the depths of the deepest chair, held out a congratulating hand to her when she passed, Miss Wright and Nelly beamed on the general

success. The guests, in going, came up to her one by one to say that it had been perfectly splendid, but even that momentary importance could not comfort her or let her in. The party was among their scarfs and cloaks, going out the door with them and Robert Russell, Jr., into the cool night; it had only swept past her on its way. Now the last echo of it had passed the hedge, and Sarah turned back to the bright empty rooms, strewn with wreckage of paper caps and flowers and wrappings. Her mother had apparently fallen apart at the last good night, and was only a limp collection of loose members piled in a big chair; but Sarah's sudden pallor roused her.

"Go right to bed, you tired little soul," she commanded, taking up again the burden of her limbs, and Sarah was glad to obey.

She could not sleep, of course. Her heart ached like a great bruise. Hour after hour the bitter blend of disappointment and shame and loneliness poisoned every unforgettable moment of the long ideal. She had been a failure, a stick, and all of them, including Robert Russell, Jr., would remember her with contempt. To the last day of her life she would not have company

again. Nothing ever came true. She wished she could die.

The fevered tossing ended at last in quiet. Something better than sleep was coming to heal the trouble. At first it was no more than a fixed wonder, like a stare. Then a soft current began to steal through all her body, stirring warmly about her heart, and finally running with a triumphant thrill down her right arm. Sarah, very grave, but with a glow in her wide eyes, stealthily lit the light, found paper and pencil and bundled herself up in a quilt. For, if she had an outrageous capacity for dreams, she had also been given a secret comfort for their failure. Brooding, intent, utterly absorbed, she began her poem of "The Party."

Rhymes sang about her in the still night, lines that she could never have thought out in cold blood came flowing down on the current still pouring so beneficently through her being. An hour passed like a moment, and another struck before the inspiration began to fade. No realism for Sarah! Her saga told the party of her dreams, all glow and music, love and laughter. The detail might be true to fact, but the effect was shamelessly, exultantly, life-as-it-

ought-to-have-been. And when at last Sarah's head fell back, the ache was forgotten, the party had been made beautiful in her sight.

She was awakened by a ripple of laughter. Her mother, twisted up in a dressing-gown, stood beside her, and the daylight was the color of noon. Overhead the gas still blazed, and the bed was strewn with scribbled paper.

"We began to think you had passed away with excitement," Mrs. Cawthorne said, laughing again as she put out the gas. "Well, was it a nice party?"

Sarah's dazed eyes had opened on some bleak cloud, unformed as yet, but unbearable. Then, before it could take shape, the scattered sheets of her inspiration came like a sweet warm wind to blow it away. There was her party in joyous, living lines, romping down the pages; reality caught and fixed in the dream, and so made beautiful. The truth of last night's experience was not actually denied: it was only buried and sown over with morning glories. Sarah's two arms shot up with her radiant face between them.

"Oh, mother, wasn't it heavenly!" she cried.



## II.

**L**IFE was more eventful after the party. Its fame spread, and though it was never repeated, Sarah was hopefully asked to other parties for years to come. She always went to them with the same exquisite joy; her heart sang, "Girls and boys—girls and boys!" as though she ran to them, arms out. But she always brought away an ache. They frightened and silenced her. She stood about on the edges of the crowd, breathless, tongueless, dazzled, and when she was carelessly swept into its evolutions, her exaltation became a shining stillness that the others did not understand. Even then she knew that she was not really in the middle of the party; but she looked as though she were, and she could be passionately grateful for that.

If there had been any one to help her, to lead her out a little, to see that she danced well or played tennis or even wore the right clothes, the vivid imaginings of her inner life would have made a place for her. She could think of such enchanting things to say or to do, if she had known how to offer them! But her mother

only kissed her and waved her off, not dreaming that there was anything more to be done, and though the children were friendly enough, not one ever chose her for a best friend. And when, later, they boasted of their early intimacy with her, she was simply grateful that they could so remember that careless acquaintance. She kept always a curious innocence. Robert Russell, Jr., sometimes left a bright trail across her sky in passing, but he was usually too occupied with his own brilliant affairs to notice her.

Out of it all, however, Sarah was making a vital discovery. The mothers, responsible, logical and sitting on chairs, could not compare with her frail little soft heap of a laughing, scatter-brained mama, but the usual father was a revelation. He joked and was joked on; he didn't mind being disturbed; and when a child's burning convictions were laid before him, he did not glance them over as though they were so many tadpoles, healthy, no doubt, but incomplete and scarcely interesting to a mature mind—he talked them out with a thrilling equality. Slowly but inevitably, these glimpses into other homes bred trouble for Mr. Cawthorne.

The trouble was very long in coming to the surface. At sixteen it was only a childish outburst, ending in tears; at seventeen the protest was scarcely more mature, though the tears were—with difficulty—kept back; nineteen saw the beginning of righteous courage and a tendency to argue. This could be snubbed down for a year or two, but in the twenties the experimenting young soul had begun to ask questions with a lurking smile, and the days of Mr. Cawthorne's peace were numbered. Sarah was clearing her young eyes of her mother's terrors, breaking loopholes through the hedge that held her captive. She was still making poppy-shows: her eye at the apertures saw men and women in combinations as lovely and unearthly as the old arrangements of violet and jasmine, plumbago and moss rose, under the magic bit of glass; but she had learned a pretty bodily dignity that hid well her naive heart. A stranger would have seen her as graceful and poised, and quite as good a model for a fairy-tale princess as in the days when she had stick legs and a face slipping out like a young crescent moon between two long falls of hair.

Shut in his library, delving with the minute

patience of a boring insect in a tiny dry corner of scholarship, Stephen Cawthorne recognized that he had a little girl somewhere in the house; and then suddenly one March day, when the wind outside perfected the inner stillness, and a manuscript that was a treasury of rare old words had just been unearthed and submitted to his judgment, he was made aware of a grown daughter facing him across the desk, demanding attention.

"Father, what am I for?" Sarah asked. She could never do anything momentous—like this—without an inner turmoil, a mingling of dread and excitement, that only battle and murder would have justified; but there was a thrill of drama in the encounter that gave it a dreadful joy, and the poised quiet of her own manner felt like a new weapon in her hand.

Mr. Cawthorne lifted a reluctant head, his eyes still making last snatches at the script before them. "H'm? What?" He was so many centuries away from her that she waited for his return before repeating the question.

"What am I for?"

He blinked at her in puzzled silence. "I don't believe the philosophers have ever decided that,"

he said at last. "I can refer you to some very searching works on the subject."

"Thank you," said Sarah politely; "but all my life I have been turned over to books for everything. I have been persistently educated. But what for? They say to little boys, 'What are you going to be when you grow up?' but they don't put the idea into a little girl's head, so here I am, done with lessons, grown up, and I don't know what it has all been for."

Mr. Cawthorne's look was mildly startled. The young lines of the face before him set him smiling at her claim, and yet, if it did not seem to him much older, it was undeniably a few feet higher up. His nod assented to her calling herself grown if she wanted to. Perhaps he was also admitting that she looked like Somebody—not just another pretty girl, but a soul in the making, for his glance lingered on the shadowy face under the dark wings of heavy hair. Later, a florid newspaper writer was to describe Sarah's face as perpetually "lit by sunlight coming through live oaks."

"Well, isn't being a daughter something?" he asked. "I suppose eventually you will be a wife—God help you," he added with the glimmer in



his eyes that his students found so delightful. Sarah hated it. It always seemed to threaten the realm of things-as-they-might-be where she lived her rich inner life.

"How can I marry? If ever I do meet a man, I am so stupid and helpless. I am really very poor, socially, father. And I don't know how to make friends." The secret cry that woke her every morning and went to sleep with her every night came out in casual words: "I rather think I want the world now. Hasn't the time come?"

Mr. Cawthorne's averted glance told nothing. By the tapping of the pen between his fingers he might have been merely bored. "Nothing in it, Sairy," he said in his laziest drawl. "Take my word—nothing in it."

"For you, perhaps. But, you know, I am me. All the books in the world won't make me over into a little you." She said that as though she were not sorry, but he only smiled in his pointed beard. "If I am to live on here, I want a home that is not dead and buried. I want to learn to make friends. Father, I am ashamed of being so solitary." She made the confession with that new smile she had been learning. "The

other girls go in twos and threes, but I am always by myself, and it is mortifying. It looks as if there were something wrong with me. Can't you see my side of it?"

He gave her an odd glance—not hostile, and not in the least apprehensive. It had even a humorous commiseration, such as a shepherd might feel for a rebellious lamb.

"You wouldn't d-d-disturb a poor c-cripple, would you?" he asked. His slow speech always developed a stammer when he was evading righteous demands. Sarah flung a swift warning at herself: "Stay grown up! Stay grown up! If you get angry, I'll kill you!"

"Yes, I would; once in a while," she said cheerfully. "Everybody has to compromise, father. We give in and give in to you. Don't you want to do your share of it?"

"N-n-no; I can't say that I care to." He was as immovable as the hedge. "You see, I'm doing something," he consented to explain.

She seized on that. "But I want to do something. And other girls' fathers—"

"Now see here, Sarah;" his tone was all patient indulgence; "some day, in the course of human events, this place will be yours, and you

can celebrate my passing with a series of the grandest old b-b-blow-outs ever held. You can have a lot of fun planning it. You wait for that."

Their eyes locked, his narrowed with amusement, seemingly kindly, hers suddenly wide with an anger that would not be kept down.

"What a dreadful thing to say!" It was a new tone from her to him, or from any one to him, and, after the impetuous words were spoken, Sarah felt herself as outrageous as if she had flung a stone. She sent a frankly scared look after it, but, fortunately, her father's eyes had gone back to his manuscript.

"I always say dreadful things," he drawled. "It's my long suit."

Finding herself miraculously not annihilated, Sarah swiftly steadied herself on the new altitude to which she had been swept. "It is not fair to say them about death," she said gravely.

He looked up at that. "There's a lot of nonsense talked about Sorrow and Loss," he explained with his most mellow smile. "We pull down the blinds and all that, but, take my word for it, Sairy, half the time the bereaved are rather pleased than otherwise. People are a

good deal of trouble. It's a relief to be rid of them."

Sarah hated that with a hot hatred that would not be denied. "Then why not live so as to leave them sorry?" she burst out. "You have only to care a little about their happiness."

Mr. Cawthorne looked as if patience might have its limits. "Get thee to a nunnery," he said wearily. "I don't know what you want, but you are spoiling a morning's work."

Her anger had given her a new strength. "I want freedom! I want to ask people here and not feel as if I had broken the ten commandments. I showed a girl the garden the other day, and the whole time I felt guilty—as if I might be *caught*. Father, that is no way for a grown girl to live!"

Mr. Cawthorne was no longer humorous. "It would be hard to move at my time of life, but if there has to be female gabbling about the place, one of us has got to," he said curtly. "And now if you please, Sarah—"

"Oh, if it weren't for mother I would go to-morrow!" she said on a deep note that her voice had never before reached. He let her leave the room without comment.

The dream of years had crashed down. Sarah had believed that when she should be brave enough to set the truth before her father he would have to recognize it. She had foreseen him as touched, a little ashamed, even. A new intimacy was to have sprung out of the encounter. Enchanting scenes, playful, affectionate, had spun themselves like bright webs about their future together. The glow of their home life would stretch out beyond the hedge and the world would pour in like a warm tide. Life and love and people! But now she had shown him the other side, and he had not cared, and nothing ever came true.

She hid her failure in the depths of the garden. The big wind, streaming in from the ocean, made the hedge, for once, of some use, and she paced up and down in its shelter without a rag of dream-glamour to shield her soul from the bleak wind of reality, or a trace of her newly learned smile. Her face would have suggested only midnight seen through cypress boughs to her future admirer, if he had stood at the gap in the hedge.

Some one did stand there, holding on his hat, a long figure, humorously thin in the betraying



wind. A brown mustache spread out in a vain attempt to fatten the gaunt face, but the little deep-set eyes smiled as though they recognized the futility of trying to make anything appear other than what it was. Seeing Sarah, he stepped gratefully out of the gale into the shelter of the green wall.

"I beg your pardon—is this Mr. Cawthorne's place?" His voice had a pleasantly trained quality, as though he spoke other languages as easily as his own, and Sarah, assenting, felt a shock of disappointment when he added, "I am from the *Recorder*." He saw her secret withdrawal—there was nothing that he would not see, and very little that would not set him smiling if it came from a girl in a sheltered garden. Some sense of a big outside world, a world where trouble was a thing of blood and shame, and dreams were about as important as hair ribbons, touched Sarah, threatening her righteous grievance. She did not resent his amusement. Her soul recognized its superior, and gravely saluted.

"Father doesn't often see newspaper men," she said with a softening hesitation. "You can try; but he hates to be interrupted in the morning."

His glance took in the quiet old house and the peaceful garden. "I don't wonder," he said on a long breath that told much. "I seem to have blundered into Heaven."

"Heaven!" It was the story of Sarah's life in one word. She had not meant to tell it to a stranger; but he was not like any stranger who had ever crossed her path, and her sense of injury was still perilously hot.

"Ah, of course; you want to get out," he said thoughtfully. His ease with her was like that of other girls' fathers, kindly and pleasant, yet sufficiently deferential to make her feel safe with him. She suddenly knew that he was the nicest man she had ever met. He did not dazzle her and take away her breath, as Robert Russell, Jr., did. He was more like an inspired young uncle. When he repeated, "You want to get out?" it was entirely natural to answer with grave candor.

"Yes. But I would rather cut down the hedge and let the world in."

"Cut down the hedge!" He shook his head as though he could have cried over her. "Oh, please promise that you will never do that!"

In truth, it had never before occurred to her



"My father doesn't often see newspaper men," she said.



as an actual possibility. She measured her old enemy up and down with an exultant thrill.

"It would burn wonderfully," she said with a little reserved smile.

"Oh, horrible! What can I do to stop you?" His distress was no less genuine because it laughed. "Will you promise me that you won't do it before your thirtieth birthday?" Though his words made a direct appeal, his voice kept a third-personal deference, as though he said, "Will Mademoiselle promise me?" It made one feel deliciously safe and free.

"But after thirty it would not matter," said Sarah. "I shan't want things then as I do now."

His look was almost affectionate. "Well, then, will you promise to send me word before you do it, and let me come and have a talk with you?"

She had a secret thought—that it would be very nice to see him again on any pretext—and it brought the sudden shine to her eyes.

"You can't change me," she said conscientiously, "but I will tell you."

"Good." He took out a card with an address in the corner. "That will always find me. And I would come from Timbuctoo to save this last quiet spot in the eternal boiler factory." He



shook her hand, as though he were going on to the house, but after a couple of steps he came back to look down on her over folded arms. "Suppose," he began, "that you wanted to do just one thing in life, wanted it so much that you would sacrifice everything else so as to do it. And then suppose, in your precious free hours, when everything depended on quiet and concentration, ladies next door were inspired to do their vocal exercises, and babies did theirs, and people below moved out and above moved in, and fire engines stopped across the street, and the cable car ran into a milk wagon, and the telephone roared—well, do you see my point?"

Sarah could scarcely wait for him to finish. For once the inner hedge was down. "And suppose you were all full of beautiful things you could say to people, but you had grown up in prison, and the wall was always there between you and the party, and you never belonged, and you were nearly dead of loneliness—suppose you dreamed out the most wonderful meetings, and yet always found yourself helpless and stupid and walled in—" Her breath gave out, but her vivid shadowy face—sunlit through live oaks—told more than words.

"In that case," he said slowly, like one feeling his way, "I would write out my beautiful dreams and mail them through the hedge. Aha!" he added as the color rushed to her forehead.

"But I never mail them," she stammered.

"Why not?" He evidently would not have considered it crazy presumption, and a new thrill shot through all her being.

"Oh, they are not good enough!"

"Probably not, as yet; but mailing them—say, to me—might help them to become so. I'm a grand critic;" he was suddenly a little boyish. "I could help you, I know. Will you let me see something you have written?"

He could not know how all her faculties were stampeded by the mad, glorious idea. People were always to misunderstand her shyness because she could look so composed. After the first flushed moment, she had the turmoil well hidden.

"You are very kind," she said, and he was reminded to look at his watch.

"I think I know where your father would stand on the subject of vocational education," he explained, "but it is my duty to ask him. Please don't forget that you have made me a promise about the hedge." And then the nicest man in

the whole world had left her, and was being admitted at the front door. Perhaps Mr. Cawthorne's work was not going so smoothly as usual, for it was half an hour before the nicest man came out again. He was making notes in a little book as he went down the drive, and he did not remember that there was any one to glance about for.

In a normal home a man like that would be asked to come again. He would be made so welcome that he would become a part of the beautiful family life, instead of instantly going out of it forever. Mr. Christopher Saxe, University Club: there he was, easily within reach, but they would never see him again. Desolate with a new kind of loneliness, Sarah went in search of her mother.

Mrs. Cawthorne sat on the sewing-room floor in a happy confusion of colored remnants, which she was tearing into strips for a rag rug. She was always falling on some new industry with a reckless joy that presently put her to bed; where the craze abruptly died. There was a closet full of unfinished products behind her, but her eyes were shining like Sarah's over her varied shades of blue.

"The darkest will be in the center, darling," she began at once. "I couldn't get the real midnight blue that I wanted. Do you think I'd better have a piece dyed? Or will this do?"

Sarah looked unseeingly at the piece held up. "Mother," she began, "when you used to ask people here—whether father liked it or not—what happened? What did he do?"

Mrs. Cawthorne considered, soberly at first, then with her light ringing laugh. "Oh, darling, he was so bad! I really should have liked to slap his hands. Sometimes he was just unhappy and restless—kept sighing and twisting in his chair, or getting up and wandering miserably around—he'd nearly make me cry. And again he'd be wicked, and lead people on to say silly things and contradict themselves—for you know, Bunny, the dearest, sweetest people aren't always so very clever in their minds. And sometimes he'd get an awfully stiff subject and harangue—oh, talk and talk till every one was nearly dead! Just badness, dear. He knew better. And then afterward I'd cry and make a fuss, but it never changed him. You can't."

Another moment of musing ended in another laugh. "He was always saying in those days

that people must have the courage of their opinions, but when they did he nearly murdered them. I never dared ask any one who would fight back. I think he really meant that they must have the courage of his opinions! But, of course, he is a very brilliant and distinguished scholar, Bunny, and we must never forget that," she added in a belated attempt to sound like a parent.

Bunny kissed her, but went away without replying. The ache in her heart was not all for herself; some of it was for her gay little mother, breaking herself against that stone wall. All her grace of spirit, her queer charm, had been powerless; how could Sarah hope to succeed? Sarah's charms were as potent in secret, but they never came out before people. And if she went forth into the world until she had learned its ways, who would open drawers and boxes for her mother, lest some little creature should lurk inside, ready to spring, or grope behind the skirts in the closet for the nightly burglar? Sarah saw an unprotected mother going to bed in a blaze of gas, her hand over her heart at every chance sound, eluding a snatch at her ankles from every shadow, perhaps at last

encountering real peril up there alone—the stealthy movement, the flash of light, the cold touch of steel—Ah-h-h!

Sarah plunged her face in a sofa cushion to stifle the scream in which her vision had ended. For the moment she had actually been her mother, tense and white and rigid, and she lay exhausted, getting back her breath. She did not laugh at herself. Her inner life was always like that, a series of dramas, and she accepted it as everybody's secret. Spent with emotion, she lay very quiet, heavy eyes fixed on space, while the healing comfort gathered from its unknown source. She knew now what was coming—the living current that made all things whole and new. When its delicious glow had reached her heart and was tingling in her arm, she crouched over note-book and pencil and began to write.

It was no longer poetry, but scenes, abrupt fragments without beginning or ending. To-day it was all of a father and daughter as they would have been if Sarah had made the world. There was a note-book full of such scenes, and when the flow had ceased, Sarah turned back to the others, idly at first, then with an idea leaping in her blood. They were all of the



same father and daughter, they glowed with affection and laughter and warm tears that had always a happy ending; why not make them into a book? Christopher Saxe had told her that she could! The iridescent webs that had spun themselves in inspired hours could be gathered up like tapestries and turned to beautiful use. A story could be woven in, and a lover, but it should be a father-and-daughter book, the gayest, kindest little book in the whole world. It came into being, great tracts at a time, so fast that she could only take lightning notes. When at last the inspiration died down, she brooded over what she had conceived in blank empty peace. A merciful year had elapsed since the hurt of the last act.

### III

**M**R. CAWTHORNE must have thought that he had dealt effectually with his daughter, for she gave him no more trouble for months afterward. Sarah, in truth, had found an open door to life and love and people, a door no bigger than the page of a blank book, with a pencil for the key. The characters of her growing story were as real to her as Ethel Alice had been to her childhood. Life, when it demanded her presence, felt thin and watery and chilly beside the mellow richness of her secret world, and she escaped back at the first chance. The protagonist, Richard Dockery, brilliant, handsome, easily powerful, most delicious of young-hearted fathers, was taken from a living model; but Robert Russell, Jr.'s, mother never recognized him, though she was to read *Dickery Dock* more than once. The heroine, Virginia, was Ethel Alice herself. Sarah's generous heart had always given her the first bite and the best jokes and the loveliest poppy-shows.

Sarah's mother heard every individual page of the book from four to ten times, and kept

Sarah's courage alive by her amazed enthusiasm. Of course, in time, Mr. Cawthorne knew about it, but he gave no sign, except to look amused when Sarah came to the table with burning cheeks and heavy eyes. On the day when the package was returned from the typewriter, two hundred and sixty fair pages, Mrs. Cawthorne was in bed, recovering from an attack of book-binding, but she read it all through again.

"And now we will send it off to a publisher," she said, looking up at her genius with touched and loving eyes.

Sarah made an excuse to carry away the manuscript. She had a sickening duty to perform first: her father must see the book. Mrs. Cawthorne had long ago declared that he need not—"For he never likes anything, Bunny, so what is the use!" But Sarah had quietly made her own decision. Perhaps, under the formality of treating her father properly, there lay a hope that Mr. Cawthorne might not find it so very bad, for her reluctance was shot through with excited thrills as she pushed open the library door.

Mr. Cawthorne was leaning back in his

chair, idle for once, perhaps dozing. For a startling moment he looked old—old and lonely; but it must have been a trick of the light, for when his eyes opened he was the same imperturbable little gray man, of no particular age, smiling in his pointed beard as he saw the manuscript.

“Is that the magnum opus?” he asked, putting out his hand for it.

She laid it before him feeling like a mother who submits her child to inexorable law.

“Of course, it isn’t very good;” she spoke with brave lightness. “But I thought you ought to read it.” Then, seeing his keen glance close down on her hapless and innocent text, she retreated, in terror of his smile.

It was an unspeakable afternoon. She could not tell her mother what was going on, for suspense made Mrs. Cawthorne ill, so, after a stumbling attempt to read aloud, Sarah carried her trembling spirit into the autumn splendor of the garden. Cutting dead flowers and tying up chrysanthemums helped her to work off the hours, but could not ease the sick heaviness in her breast or quiet the shaking of her limbs. Every sound that might mean the opening of

the library door came like the rattle of tumbrils at prison windows. Yet always, underneath, ran that terrible thrill of expectancy: he might think it good! She did not dare leave the grounds lest she miss the first impulsive moment; but the afternoon dragged on and he did not emerge.

Her dream-power at last came to help her through. A lovely scene of a proud astonished father taking a newly discovered daughter to his heart, brought relaxing tears to her eyes as she prepared for the inevitable meeting at dinner. It was so warmly real that for a moment she was only glad when her father came into the dining-room. Then she met his quizzical glance, and her heart shrank from him.

"Well, Sarah, you must have had a lot of fun doing that," he said, laying the manuscript beside her plate. "I have corrected the spelling in a few places, but I suppose that was the typewriter. I don't believe a child of mine would spell develop with a final 'e.' Is your mother coming down?"

"No," said Sarah faintly.

Mr. Cawthorne shook out the evening paper and folded it to dinner-table size.

"You have been well grounded in rhetoric," he said, his eyes on the head-lines. "I did not suppose you could express yourself with so much variety. The style is very fair, for a beginner." And, being served, he settled down to read.

Sarah waited until she could steady her voice. Then, "What publisher would you try?" she asked.

"Publisher?" That was a new idea, and he considered it dubiously. "Oh, I don't believe I would publish," he concluded.

The worst had happened, and it brought the courage of despair.

"Then you don't think it is at all good?"

His head-shake was tempered by other considerations. "You couldn't call it literature. No, it isn't good—I suppose—fundamentally—it's trash. But it is a pleasant way to occupy yourself. And if you keep on, you may some day do something—when you know more about life."

Know more about life! The monstrous irony of that from him, who had planted and nursed the hedge, would have enraged her if she had not been so crushed with disappointment. For



her father knew; no calling him hot names could blur the fact that he knew about literature. Her book fundamentally was trash.

Mr. Cawthorne ate a placid dinner without a suspicion of what he had done. Criticizing the efforts of the young was all in the day's work; he dealt with the product, not with the producer. If he noticed anything, it was that he was allowed to read his paper in peace. Sarah's pride kept her erect and dry-eyed; there was even a dreary satisfaction in perfecting her outer composure, denying him a glimpse of her hurt to smile at. Mr. Cawthorne at last finished his coffee and gave her the paper, tapping the signed article he had been reading.

"There is some plain sense on the Japanese bogy," he said. "I would read it if I were you. The man is remarkably sound and wise and right. He thinks just as I do." And he limped serenely back to his library. When the door had quite closed, Sarah gave the paper a violent twist and threw it into the fireplace; but the two main impulses of her being, to be fair and to be courteous, still kept a precarious dominance.

"It is not logical to hate a person because

he does not admire your work," she said, very quietly and distinctly. "In fact, it is ridiculous. And it isn't grown up. He is quite right to call my book trash if that is the truth; and if in return I were to call him"—suddenly her eyes blazed and her jaw set—"a *horrid old pig*—well, it wouldn't change the situation," she concluded with restored politeness, rising and gathering up the manuscript.

Telling her mother was not to be thought of that night. Mrs. Cawthorne would not make the slightest attempt to be cool and grown up about it, and she would lose her night's sleep. Sarah had long ago learned to hide all calamities till morning. Then she told them lightly, as though they were only good news a little inverted. Already her protective love was shaping a cheerful announcement of her father's verdict as she slipped past her mother's door, carrying the poor dead thing to the attic, where it might have decent burial in her old camphor-wood chest.

Her last doll was there, and her first fan, and a rather meager collection of girlhood treasures. She had never lacked the things that money buys; but treasures are made out of a

girl's burning intimacies or the ecstatic jokes of fellowship. There was a pencil that had been Robert Russell, Jr.'s, but her possession of it had no Robert-to-Sarah flavor; he had merely lent it to her at a tennis tournament and forgotten to come back for it. Sarah placed the candle she had brought on an old bureau, and, sitting on a corner of the chest, dug out a grave at the very bottom for her manuscript—under the other trash. Her mother would not have come alone to the big, shadowy, unfinished place even by broad daylight, but Sarah had shielded her for too long to have any little fears of her own, and the ghostly old cave, tenanted by cast off sewing-machines and broken cribs and ugly Victorian furniture, gradually took the outrageousness from the blow that had been dealt her. It seemed to say that all bright new things ended in trash. That was the common lot.

“And now what? What is left? What can I go on to?” she demanded, looking about her like one newly awakened in a bleak place. The rich companionship of the past months was slain. Richard Dockery and Virginia, his daughter, had been more real than any mere

flesh-and-blood relatives, but now a single word had knocked the breath of life out of them, and she was as far away as ever from life and love and people. *People!* Sitting there like a princess locked in a tower, she seemed to see them streaming past the hedge, girls happily together and youths hurrying after them, lovers and bridal couples arm in arm, young fathers and mothers smiling at each other over what they held, mature men and women guiding their communities and knowing some one to speak to on every corner, kindly and tranquil grandparents, and everywhere, like daisies in the grass, the darling babies; all belonging together in a glorious human chain woven round the earth.

"Oh, let me out, let me out!" she called to them. The longing swelled, broke and retreated, leaving her drenched with a sadness as fragrant as wet violets, as resonant as violins. Sarah's imagination was like the retinue of royalty, which, even for a single night's stop, unrolls rugs and hangs tapestries; it never left her long in a bare room. And as the beauty returned to her stripped world, her ancient comfort began to stir warmly at her sides and

to flow in her right arm. Her fingers closed on Robert Russell's pencil; then she threw it down, breaking herself loose from the spell.

"What is the use of writing if it is only trash when it is done?" she asked aloud. The empty days unrolled before her in a long gray scroll, and her soul fainted before them. "I really can not bear it," she said, very quietly, even politely. "I am sorry, but I can not. This is the end. I am going out into the world. I will come back to mother as often as possible, but I won't live like this another week. I will get work—I'll join clubs—I will belong—"

The silence of the old house was split by a scream. It was a dreadful scream, mad, agonized. No heart could have heard it without a leap. Sarah sprang to her feet, but, for all her quickness, she managed to close the chest and blow out the candle as she flew.

"I'm coming, dear," she called. "Don't mind—I'm coming!" She ran down the stairs just as Nelly came hurrying up, but neither looked more than mildly concerned until they saw what might have been an empty dressing-gown across the sill of Sarah's room. Mrs. Cawthorne was inside it, unconscious.

She was so long in reviving and then so shaken and hysterical, that Sarah sent Nelly out to telephone for the doctor. Mr. Cawthorne had opened the library door and stood there awaiting an explanation, but Nelly assured him it was nothing. (There was no sense in disturbing him.)

"The poor lady saw a mouse, most likely," she apologized.

"No; I should say a rat at the very least," Mr. Cawthorne decided with cold emphasis. "Or perhaps a boa constrictor. The mouse cry is less resonant." And he closed his door again. It was very evident that he had been disturbed.

Up-stairs, Sarah was stroking the hands that clutched her own and trying to find out what had happened.

"I'm just an old fool, dear," her mother sobbed. "Perfect idiot. But, you see, you weren't down-stairs—Nelly had seen you come up; and I looked in all the rooms up here, but I couldn't find you, and suddenly I was in a panic. I couldn't stand it, not finding you. I went back to your room, and as I opened the door—I told you I was an utter fool! Oh, I suppose it was the curtain that flew out of the



window—" She cried and clung and tried to laugh. "Oh, Bunny, if you were so silly, I'd put you to bed on bread and water!"

"You can't help it," Sarah argued reasonably. "You are made like that. You don't scream half as often as you would like to."

Mrs. Cawthorne grew quieter at once; her hot grasp relaxed. "That's true, darling," she said, brightening. "I put a beetle out myself yesterday—I didn't say a word about it to any one. Oh, I know I ought to be killed for it," she added, sighing. "But I try, Bunny, I try. Your father never knows how hard I try. Of course he heard. I dare say I've made his head ache."

"Not so badly as yours is aching," Sarah said, passing her finger tips over the white lined forehead where the nerves visibly quivered and throbbed. The eyes below looked up at her with a gleam of amusement.

"Such a wise, steady old darling—I might have known you wouldn't go bounding out of a window. By the way, where were you?"

"In the attic." Sarah heard wheels below and rose relievedly from the bed. She did not want to be questioned about her errand. Mrs.

Cawthorne, however, was too awed by her courage to seek reasons.

"The attic! To think that I should have mothered a young lion like you," she murmured.

"There's Doctor Russell, dear," Sarah explained, going to the door. "I thought he'd better—" She stopped short, for the step on the stairs had a young vigor, and she was looking down on a smooth blond head.

"My father was out, so I ran over to see if I could be of any use," Robert, Jr., explained with the deferential gravity of a very new practitioner. "You know I am with him now," he added, thinking she needed reassurance; but Sarah's stare had only meant that his coming was too good to be true.

Since she had seen him, he had taken on eyeglasses and a more responsible deportment as well as a small and foreign looking chin tuft, a young man's compromise between his need of years and his dislike of a beard. He was not unaware of his very good looks, but he evidently knew himself possessed of qualifications so much more valuable that he could afford to forget them. To a critical eye he had an air of throwing them in free.

To Sarah he was a figure of dazzling distinction. She had once seen him as a fairy-tale prince, but now he was like a fine and wise young king going about the business of his realm. She put out her hand with the sudden shine in her eyes.

"It is young Doctor Russell, mother," she explained over her shoulder. (That was a delicious thing to call him—"young Doctor Russell.")

Mrs. Cawthorne, very flat, brightened all over as the commanding figure drew up a chair beside her.

"Well, perhaps he can put some sense into me. His father never could," she said. "I had a fright, Doctor Robert, and I behaved very badly; but I don't know what you can do about it."

"There are several things I might do about it;" he spoke with a largeness that suggested limitless resource. "That is what we physicians are for, Mrs. Cawthorne—to make you behave better." He gave her a disciplinary nod, and Sarah, leaning on the foot of the bed, felt a thrilled longing to have the discipline include her. One could pretend to be mutinous

for the joy of feeling it tighten. "I have always wanted to get my hands on you," he added.

"H'm! Undermining your father's business?"

"I have no wish to do that," he explained seriously. "But we younger men have new theories about nervous disorders, and I happen to have been rather successful in two or three cases. Largely luck, I suppose." He drew up one shoulder, then the other, very faintly, yet enough to give Sarah a lightning vision of a glorious boy standing over a breathless little girl and explaining his extraordinary prowess in social affairs. "We modern men take a broader view of such disorders. We often have to reorganize a patient's whole life, and to treat her family quite as much as we treat her."

"You might reorganize me, but I don't advise you to try it on my family," Mrs. Cawthorne said.

"I don't know. Sarah looks amenable to reorganization." He had always called her Sarah on their rare meetings—with a grave air of having the right that derives from a childhood intimacy; and Sarah had said "Robert" back with a gay tremble in her heart. It was thrilling to call any one so assured and lordly "Rob-

ert." "I think I could organize her." He looked into her shadowy face just as her smile came out; the real Sarah was at the gap in the hedge, the Sarah that endowed the world with such magic and beauty that, later, it was to have hours when it almost believed her. For the moment Robert Russell, Jr., saw himself as she saw him, and his glance came back again and again for a renewal of the stimulating endorsement.

"Oh, Sarah was born polite. You can do anything with people who are born polite;" Mrs. Cawthorne was looking gayer and younger every minute; "but I am afraid my husband—wasn't. He is really a very bad old man," she added cheerfully.

"We'll see about that." His nod said that he would attend to Mr. Cawthorne later, but effectually. "Will you really let me study your case? I will agree to make it all right with my father."

"Oh, he gave me up long ago. He comes when I frighten my family into sending for him, but he only tells me funny stories. Do study me—I should adore it." Her laugh rang out. "But, I warn you, I will never have a doctor when I

am very ill, for then I can't enjoy him. It is too bitter, to waste a nice visit like that."

His father would have found that amusing, but Robert took it as food for serious reflection.

"Then you don't see many visitors," he observed, looking into her face with a concentrated interest that did her visible good.

"Oh, no one comes past the hedge unless he is paid for it!"

He asked minute questions about her days and occupations; nothing was too trivial to interest him. Her flashes of humor quite passed him by, but Sarah decided that she liked him all the better for that: it seemed to add to his power. He could scarcely have shown a quality for which she would not have liked him the better in that richly pleasant hour. His presence was momentous, and yet they were so cozy together up there, the three of them. The day's tragedy had grown remote, unimportant.

"I'm going to give you a night's sleep, and then we will go into things more thoroughly tomorrow," he said as he rose. "If I come in rather often"—his eyes rested on Sarah for a moment—"don't think I am running up a tremendous bill. I do this for my satisfaction."



"Oh, there is money enough; and we spend very little on amusement," was the strange answer. She was a very strange little lady with her gay eyes in a white spent face and her child's laugh.

Sarah went down-stairs with him, lowering her voice as they neared the library door, which was slightly ajar. She would have hurried him out, but Robert planted himself on the hall rug to deliver his opinion.

"Do you know what you ought to do for your mother?" he began. Sarah's eyes warned, implored, but he saw only daughterly anxiety. "You ought to cut down that infernal hedge," he said in full and resonant tones. "It has been smothering her all these years. It will smother you, too, if you don't look out." He took her hand, and his strength seemed to flow into her. "You get it cut down—that's my advice."

Dense silence behind the library door.

"Yes; I think it is bad for us all," said Sarah clearly. "Good night, Robert. Do come often. You have done my mother good already."

She saw him out and closed the door. Then panic seized her and she fled up the stairs.

#### IV

**F**OR a long time one of Sarah's daily excitements—and no one looking on at her sheltered existence could have suspected how many excitements it concealed—had been to search the papers for the names of Christopher Saxe and Robert Russell, Jr. She knew that Saxe's name must gloriously emerge, sooner or later, when the secret work to which he had been feeding his life was accomplished. New poetry, scientific discoveries, philosophy, research—Sarah looked over every field, and then with a faint sinking ran her eye down the death lists. For Robert Russell, Jr., she had turned to the social notes, with a side glance at accidents by land and water craft, and had occasionally found him. That she should one night have found him on her stairs would have been beyond even her power to dream.

And yet it had come true. Sarah had gone out into the hall as casually as if it were Nelly who was mounting, her heart secretly heavy with the knowledge that, no matter what bold resolutions she announced, she could not possi-

bly leave home and her poor little mother; and there, coming up as serenely as though it were an every-day business, vigorous, distinguished, grave with fine responsibility, was—*Robert*. That night Sarah lived the moment over and over, always with the same delicious pause and then the leap of amazed joy. The hour that had followed, the mad daring of that last moment in the hall, were good dream stuff, too, and could be relived almost as often. Richard Dockery and Virginia, his daughter, beloved companions of many months, had been ruthlessly slain, the magic carpet that she had spent years in weaving to carry her over the hedge had been reduced to a little bundle of trash; but Sarah, waking late the next morning, saw only the drama of the coming day. When she went to the window, she did not look off to the dark mass of the city, spread along its hills beyond the far glimmer of the bay, but down into the garden, as though its sunny borders held happiness enough.

Autumn rains had refreshed the earth, rested by the long summer drought, and green was bursting up everywhere, as if a mature and vigorous second spring were at hand. Frost

had not yet dimmed the chrysanthemums and salvia ran like fire beyond the lawn. Already the day outside was warm, though the night chill lingered in the house. Sarah came out of her door a little later with jubilant energy, but her mother, up and dressed, signaled a hasty warning from her room.

"Your father didn't sleep all night," she explained in a whisper. "He is trying to get a nap now, before he goes over to the University." She looked care-worn, guilty. "I did it, you know, Bunny!"

"Well, I added to it," Sarah confessed.

"Oh, did you, dear? He is frightfully upset. He won't say anything—he just bears it. And the worst of it is, I am perfectly likely to scream again any moment!"

Sarah had to stifle a laugh. "Come down and have breakfast, anyway," she suggested, putting out her arm, and they stole down the stairs together like two girls. Safe in the dining-room, Mrs. Cawthorne reverted to Sarah's admission.

"How did you bother him, dear?"

"I said things to Robert—so he would hear. I knew there would be trouble this morning."

"What things?"

"That the hedge ought to come down."

"Oh, Sarah!" Mrs. Cawthorne was shocked and enjoyed the sensation; then vistas of past struggles brought a slow head-shake. "You can't fight people who make you sorry," she said. "I used to fight, all those years and years before you came; but whenever I went more than so far, he always had a headache. It was so mean of him!" Her laughter was suddenly uppermost. "I remember, when I insisted on having your Aunt Sadi stay here—his own sister!—he went to bed with a fever afterward. I don't know how you can fight that."

"The fever was real?"

"Oh, yes; but it is so easy to be ill!" Mrs. Cawthorne had only a shrug for bodily troubles. "If you think you have been wronged and let yourself get wrought up, of course you have a miserable headache or a temperature or insomnia."

"But it really is not—square," Sarah argued with her courteous little hesitation before the harsh term. Sarah might have been the original of the delightful, "I'm sorry that I spelt the word, I hate to go above you." "To get

your own way by making people sorry—no, that truly is not sporting.”

“Ah, my dear!” murmured her mother, but Sarah did not heed.

Presently she came out of her thoughts at a different place. “Was he just the same before his lameness, mother?” Mr. Cawthorne had been thrown from a horse when Sarah was a baby, permanently injuring his left knee.

“Just about, except that he loved walking. Every day, rain or shine, he took a long walk.”

“Did you go with him?”

Mrs. Cawthorne clasped her hands behind her head and blinked at memories she seemed to find on the ceiling, a glimmer of laughter growing under her fluttering lids. “I did try to, Bunny; oh, I did! But you couldn’t trust him. He would say, ‘Suppose we walk over to the creek.’ Well, that was a nice safe walk and I’d like it. But when we got started he would always want to go on and climb Grizzly Peak or something—and cut across lots where there was a bull or grass all full of snakes or a loose horse, and open the gates of people’s barnyards with cross dogs raging out at us—oh, my dear, I used to be sick with apprehension



from the moment we started!" Her light laugh rang out, taking it all as comedy. "And when we would really just go to the creek and then turn back, I would be so gay, I nearly danced!"

Sarah's troubled gaze had passed on to what lay back of the tale. It was sometimes hard to preserve the perfect idyl of dream-marriage in the face of the parental instance; and yet to have marred that dream would have left her heart so widowed that she had often to do a little hasty rearranging of facts.

"He didn't know," she urged. "He wanted you with him, and he didn't understand."

"Oh, he knew; but he didn't care so long as I didn't say it. If he could seem not to know a thing, it never bothered him. And, of course, I was ashamed of being such a goose, and did my best to hide it. But when your knees are shaking so that you can hardly walk, and your mouth is so dry that you can't speak, it's hard not to seem a little depressed. I never should have minded being killed, or even badly hurt. It was only being frightened that I couldn't stand. Now and then I'd say, oh, so pleasantly! —'You go on, dear, and I'll turn back;' but he'd come back with me and be so disappointed that

—well, you know, Bunny, the bull was almost better! I try to think it's my bad back that makes such a coward of me; and then they used to bring girls up that way. It was always, 'Lisa mustn't get hurt!' when I was little. I'm glad you are brave, darling. But that was one thing that made me want to be very considerate of your father. I knew I was a disappointment to him about walks."

Sarah, visualizing with painful clearness her mother's terrors, came out at a startling discovery: "Why, then I suppose you were almost relieved when he couldn't take walks any more!" But that shocked Mrs. Cawthorne.

"Oh, Bunny, dear! It nearly broke my heart. That's the way he made me sorry for all the walks I had spoiled," she added with a sigh. "It doesn't pay to be sorry. Better let your life be swallowed whole than be sorry." Then she started, turning to the windows. "Oh, my dear!" she gasped.

A brisk motor had swung in past the opening of the hedge and was winding through the shrubbery, tooting freely at every curve. Its final blast was delivered squarely under Mr. Cawthorne's windows, where the gardener was

weeding the drive. Then the door-bell pealed, and Robert Russell, Jr., was shown in.

"I hope I am not too early; we busy physicians have to come as we can," he said, struck by the dismay of his patient's greeting. For the moment Sarah had looked nearly as frightened; then Robert's stalwart presence restored her sense of proportion, reminding her how things were outside of the hedge. After all, a man's nap was not a life and death matter!

"I am so glad you have come," she said clearly, as though hoping that the words might be heard up-stairs; but Mrs. Cawthorne had given up all that years before.

"Oh, Robert, you must leave the car outside," she exclaimed, her frail hands unconsciously clutching his sleeve. "Your father always does. Mr. Cawthorne hates them. And this morning of all others, when he was trying to get a little sleep—I don't know what he will say!"

Robert looked down on her distress as though he were studying an interesting phenomenon. His father would have patted, soothed and joked, but the son merely stood like a tower of serene strength and thought her over.

"I suspected as much," he said. "I shall have

to begin with your family, Mrs. Cawthorne, before I—”

“Perhaps you would like to begin with me now?” said a suave voice from the doorway. Mr. Cawthorne stood there, small and bland, with a dire gleam behind his glasses. “I have fifteen minutes that I can spare you before I go to my class. I think I should enjoy a little talk with you.”

“Thank you. I should like it very much,” said Robert heartily.

Mrs. Cawthorne made a frightened movement, as though she would have saved him, then sank into a chair. Even Sarah was pale as they watched the little elderly man conduct the big young one to his library and softly close the door.

“Oh, Sarah!” moaned her mother, clenched fingers at her mouth.

Her own pounding heart angered Sarah. “Father can’t actually hurt Robert,” she exclaimed.

“Oh, he can half kill him! There are words worse than swords. But it isn’t the words—it’s having your personality sucked out of your body. I don’t know how he does it—it’s chemi-

cal, Bunny! He leaves you a rag, a nonentity. You defy him in your heart a million times, but face to face you are like a hypnotized bird—all the strength and value drawn out of you!" She had never spoken so before, never shown anything deeper than a laughingly helpless derision, and Sarah was as startled as though the familiar wall had developed a secret door. Mrs. Cawthorne went on with suppressed passion: "You can't fight a person who has no heart—not unless you have no heart yourself. You've got to be willing to hurt even to the death; and if you have a heart, you aren't willing. You would rather be wiped out than hurt any one like that. Your own heart will defeat you, dearest, will always defeat you. Don't try, don't try!" Her clinging hands begged a promise, but Sarah's power to soothe rested on the very fact that, for all her gentleness, she never gave false comfort.

"He is human, mother; and, also, he knows the truth when he hears it," she said steadily. "He may fight it, but he knows. He is going to hear a good deal of it from me. I am not afraid any longer; it is only a bad habit now. My body shakes, but my mind doesn't." She even smiled.

"You know, I rather like him! One wants to kill him, but he has charm."

A curious light transfigured Mrs. Cawthorne's face; for the moment, a fragile loveliness seemed to rise like the mirage of a lost girlhood. "Ah, if you had known him thirty years ago! Charm—there never was such charm!" Then the flush faded and she shook away tears with her light laugh. "Don't marry charm, Bunny; it is of very little use in the domestic circle. Marry good, solid, commonplace qualities, health and affection and, if possible, no sense of humor." That brought back her thoughts to the closed door across the hall. "Oh, I am sorry for Robert. It was my fault," she exclaimed.

She frankly watched, and Sarah less frankly leaned on a chair back that was within range. She had emerged crushed from that door too often not to dread the appearance of poor gallant Robert, who had gone so unselfishly to their aid. They listened as though crashing sounds might be expected. Sarah tried feebly to make fun of their suspense, but when at last the door-knob turned, her body was sorely shaken for her champion's sake.



The door swung back, opened by a vigorous hand, and the two men were revealed, framed together: a large, serene, confident young practitioner, every smooth blond hair in place, and in his shadow a small, rumped, baffled-looking scholar with a hurried limp. Some new and bewildering experience must have befallen Mr. Cawthorne. Had a master of the rapier tried to fight a mastodon, he might have given that same shriveled and exasperated effect.

"We physicians have to tell people things they don't want to hear. That is what we are for," Robert was saying with a kindly patience. "And we don't have any hard feelings if it isn't welcome. We learn to leave our personalities at home."

"I should be grateful if you would bring yours with you another time," was the sharp answer. "I have a message for it." And Mr. Cawthorne went out, shutting the front door with primitive vehemence.

Robert came back to his case smiling contentedly from a whole skin.

"Very clever man, Mr. Cawthorne," he announced. "Peppery, but we don't mind that. We get the nurse's attitude—hot words are no

more important than what is said in delirium. Your husband and I are going to be great friends before we are through, Mrs. Cawthorne. And now shall we get down to business?"

Mrs. Cawthorne was looking up at him as though he had returned from the jaws of death. "You are an amazing person, Robert," she murmured. "I think you will succeed." Sarah said nothing, but she felt as a slim white yacht must feel when an ironclad comes up the coast.

Robert descended from Mrs. Cawthorne's room an hour later, drawing on his gloves with an air of professional power that smote Sarah deliciously under the second button of her blouse. She stood by the front door in a droopy garden hat and gauntlets, a flat basket heaped with dark red chrysanthemums in her hand, as different from the gay, go-ahead, unromantic modern girls that he knew as the life inside the hedge differed from the world outside. Their fragrance was only orris; they might fall in love or frankly challenge him to do so, but there was no lingering poetry in the way they looked at him, they could not—to save their necks—be at the same time delicately aloof and yet hero-worshipping.

"Sarah, I want to talk with you for ten minutes," Robert began with a preoccupied glance at his watch.

"Come out into the sun," she said, and turned back to the front steps, shutting the door that they might not be overheard. "You are not worried about my mother?" she added quickly as he did not speak.

"Oh, no. Nothing of that sort." Robert sat down beside her, but seemed indolent about beginning. It was wonderfully pleasant there. A little orange tree beneath them was already in blossom, and the round bed of heliotrope across the drive was still sweet. Sarah felt herself opening like a flower in the sun.

"I can't sit on the steps like this that I don't instinctively put out my hand for a little dog," she confided. "I never had one, yet the ghosts of little dogs trot about the garden with me and climb into my lap when I sit down. Don't you love the way a dog smiles up at you?"

He quite obviously loved the way Sarah smiled up at him. "You ought to have a dog," he said. "I prescribe it for you. I will find you—"

"Oh, no!" The idea made her laugh. "My

father hates dogs worse than he hates motor-cars."

That brought him back to the professional issue. He turned a disapproving look on the hedge.

"Well, I let your father have it pretty straight this morning;" he had a disciplinary nod for Mr. Cawthorne. "I began with the hedge—abominable thing!—but I very soon saw that that was hopeless. We physicians have to have a sort of instinct, when to go on and when to retreat." Again that faint drawing up of the shoulders, which Sarah loved. "So I dropped that and gave him my alternative: a winter in the city."

"Leave home!" She could not take it seriously.

"The sooner the better." He turned to face her squarely. "Sarah, there is nothing organic the matter with your mother. I had a long talk with my father about her last night—he takes very much my view of the case; and everything I have seen this morning confirms my impression. She is frail, very highly strung, and this life has had somewhat the effect on her that solitary confinement has on a prisoner. I want

to get her into more normal conditions. Shouldn't you like it yourself?"

"Like it?" Sarah's eyes brimmed with tears. "Like it, Robert! Oh, I have been beating against the bars ever since I can remember! But my father will never—"

"That's the sort of thing my father says—'Cawthorne won't.' We younger men say, 'By George, Cawthorne has got to!' Of course, he refused; blew up, in fact. I let him. Then I told him the same thing over again, and then again. That's my method. You leave him to me." Robert rose, buttoning his coat. "He can stay here if he chooses, but you two are going."

He was so tranquil with power that for the moment she believed him. "You are like a knight riding to the rescue," she said. "You don't know—oh, you don't know!"

He did not at all want to go. "Ride down to the hospital with me," he commanded. "I shall have to fly, but the run will do you good. As your family physician, I insist on it." He held back the door of the offending car, and with an, "Oh, I couldn't!" still on her lips, Sarah found herself stepping in. "I can't bring you back,

but you won't mind taking the trolley, will you?" he added, starting the machinery with skilful hands.

"I haven't any money."

"Then, of course, you will have to walk."

Their laughter ended in happy silence. Robert, who did only one thing at a time and did it beautifully, gave his whole attention to running the car, and Sarah, holding the brim of her garden hat, smiled out from under it at the flying world and called to it, "I'm getting out, I'm getting out!" in her wildly beating heart. When they jumped down at the hospital, she put up a meek palm, and Robert, straightening a leg and lifting an elbow, brought out a handful of silver with an amused and husbandly air.

"Better take more. Something might happen," he urged, but she would have only a nickel.

"If I took more, I should pay it back; and it is such fun not to," she said. The sheer fun of it made her laugh to herself all the way home. For once, life had had almost as much charm as she could put into it in her dreams.

She knew that Mr. Cawthorne would be back from the University by this time, and she slipped into the house with excusable quietness,



but the library door stood open as though he had been watching for her.

"Sarah!" he summoned her. There was none of the usual amused drawl in his voice; he sat sharply upright at his desk, moving his papers about with quick irritable hands.

"Remember that your mind isn't afraid—it is only your body," Sarah warned herself as she went in. It was hard not to propitiate, not to offer a pleasantly innocent, "Did you want me?" that would testify to a blameless conscience; only in the last year or two had she put down that weakness. She knew that she must look grave and composed and fully capable of recognizing it if any one made himself ridiculous, and not even Mr. Cawthorne's merciless vision could have seen how her heart was thumping as she stood there, awaiting his explanation.

"Look here, Sarah, I don't want your mother to have dealings with that young jackass;" a final push at the papers launched him on his subject. "If her health demands it, she can call in the best doctor on the coast, or send East for a specialist—I don't care. But I won't have this raw specimen experimenting on her or telling me how I should conduct my life."

Sarah spoke quietly, almost indifferently: "I thought what he said was very sensible."

Her father visibly started, and then their eyes locked. It seemed to Sarah as though her whole future as her father's child hung on the outcome of that look. "He is only a selfish little man, very cross," she told herself, over and over, and though on Mr. Cawthorne's side the encounter ended in weary contempt, she knew that she had not lost.

"Sarah, I'm a n-n-nervous man;" he had suddenly relaxed into his most drawling stammer. "For the truth's sake, I have to c-contradict about everything you say, but I don't want any a-a-argument about it. Your blond friend will never make a success as a doctor. I admire him unspeakably, but he has the hide of a r-r-rhinoceros and the understanding of a public school defective. He ought to go on the stage. Strongly as I am drawn to him, I must refuse to encourage him in a mistaken career. I don't want to hear him blow his horn again, inside or outside of my house. Have I been perfectly c-c-clear?"

Two furious little flames burned in Sarah's cheeks and her quiet had grown rigid, but by

main force she kept her eyes as expressionless as her voice.

"Mother has faith in him and that in itself helps," she said. "And if she and I go to town for the winter, he is not likely to trouble you."

She had at least broken through his guard; his speech was suddenly sharp again. "Your mother is about as fit to live in town as you are to—do any useful thing. Don't quote that young man's nonsense, if you please. I don't want him admitted to the house again. That is all I have to say."

Sarah left the room without answering and went straight up to her mother. Mrs. Cawthorne lay on a couch, her hands clasped under her head, her eyes happy with dreams.

"Oh, Sarah dear," she began at once, "wouldn't it be fun if your father really would move over to town for a few months? Robert suggested it, and told me about some furnished apartments. I could go out and ride on the dummies every day, and get to a shop now and then, and be near your Cousin Frances. We could go to matinées, Bunny—or a movie!" With her shining eyes, she looked almost girlish. "Your father would have to cross the bay

twice a week for his classes, and of course nothing on earth would make him do it, anyway; but I have had such a beautiful time, playing with it! I love the city, but, when I go from here, I get there too tired. We'd slip out at night, sometimes, darling, and see the lights and the people. You would adore it! Nelly could go with us, and Maria could get her niece to stay with her here—she would have a nice rest. Oh, I have it all planned—I've even packed the trunks!" Her laugh rang out. "What could we do to make that bad old man consent?"

Sarah had sat down on the couch, her face averted, gently rubbing her mother, who had a cat's love of being stroked.

"Suppose we go without him," she said. "He would not be happy over there, and that would spoil it for us."

"Leave him alone!"

"Why not? He lives alone here, anyway. And Maria can take care of him."

"Oh, but, dearest!" A dozen fatal objections struggled for precedence. "Maria wouldn't do things nicely enough if I weren't here. He is so particular. With all the pains I take, half the time he won't eat his soup or his salad or

something. And he doesn't say much, Bunny—we must admit that. But when he gets up from the table and goes away with that patient, half fed air—oh, darling, it does make me so wretched!”

“And then you don't eat anything more yourself;” Sarah's quiet was still a matter of a clenched will; “but if you are not at the table, he eats what is set before him without noticing. I have seen that for years. I really think he would be as happy without us. And I want to go, mother. Very much. I almost think that it is—my right. Shouldn't I have a chance at life before I am—too old? I can't leave you, you know, so oughtn't you perhaps to come with me?” All her softening hesitations, the caressing tenderness of her hand, could not keep down Mrs. Cawthorne's distress.

“Of course you should be having it, darling! Ah, we will find a way. You can perfectly well leave me—”

“No. And you know it, mother.”

“Ah, don't ask me to go! He would make me sorry, one way or another. And I can not bear being sorry—I have learned that. You know he wouldn't like it.”



"Yes; but he doesn't like Robert, mother. He wants us to forbid him the house."

Mrs. Cawthorne looked grave over that; then she shrugged. "Oh, well, Robert is only an amusement. And if he is going to come charging in and disturb your father—I can write him a very tactful little note. That doesn't matter very much."

"It matters to me!"—the words were at Sarah's lips, but she crushed them back. Her mother would have exclaimed, wanted to know more, and there was nothing whatever to tell. But, as the price of that suppression, she told something else, baldly, without any of the usual softening of harsh facts.

"He doesn't like my book, either. He read it and he says it is trash. I am not going to publish it. He said it was a nice way to occupy myself and that I might do something when I knew more about life, but that this was fundamentally trash."

Mrs. Cawthorne had risen up on one stiffening arm. Sarah was frightened when she saw the blaze in her white face.

"Oh, cruel, stupid!" she breathed. "He doesn't know what he is talking about. He is



ignorant, Sarah—ignorant of everything but the one thing he knows. Don't believe him. How can he understand your book when he hasn't a heart to read it by?" She rose, drawing her dressing-gown tightly about her. "Don't listen to him, don't let him crush you down! Wait here!"

"Where are you going?" Sarah exclaimed.

"To speak to him!" she said from the door, and closed it after her with an authority that might not be questioned.

She came back in five minutes, still with that exalted dignity, the composure of a wrath that has transcended bodily frailty and hampering compassion.

"I have told him that he does not know anything about human beings, and that he judged your book like a fool," she said harshly, throwing off her wrapper and beginning to dress. "And I told him we were going over to town at once, you and I, to find an apartment for the winter. I told him that it was your turn, and that I meant to see that you got it; that he wasn't going to swallow your life whole! Hurry, Sarah—bring a bag and we will stay all night. Don't lose a minute!"

She was not to be answered in that mood. Sarah slipped quietly out of the room, but a moment later she was charging up the attic stairs, to dive to the bottom of the camphor-wood chest where the manuscript was hidden. The other treasures, scattered right and left, lay where they fell as she ran down, her book clasped against her heart. Into the dead faces of Richard Dockery and Virginia, his daughter, had come a flicker of life.

## V

**O**F course, as soon as the excitement of catching the train had died down, Sarah knew that it was not really true. She was not going to get out as easily as this. A hedge that has been growing for a generation can not be brushed away in a moment. She played up, discussed neighborhoods and rents and the number of rooms they should require, responded with unflagging excitement to the reckless holiday mood that had followed her mother's wrath; but all the time it was like a tantalizingly good dream wherein the sleeper fights a growing conviction that he is not awake.

The familiar trip across the bay had become high adventure. Sarah stood up in front of the ferry boat, that she might feel it galloping under her to the bright west and the purpling mass of the city, flung over its hills and banded down like Gulliver in Lilliput by its taut streets. Their lunch hour was long past, so they went first to the hotel, high above the town, and walked carpeted miles to the two rooms and bath that Mrs. Cawthorne had commanded.

"Isn't it fun!" they laughed, exploring their comforts and comparing the views from their respective windows. They were still more gay at their table in the deserted lunch room, ordering barracuda and artichokes and alligator pear salad and other delightful things that Mr. Cawthorne would not eat.

"If it were only real!" was Sarah's secret cry as they set out on their quest. "If I didn't know that it will come to an end any minute!"

The doubt followed her through every doorway. Her mother was burningly in earnest, they allotted the rooms and planned life in every apartment that was worth considering, and yet it seemed to Sarah as if the very janitors knew that they were not really coming. By night they had taken the refusal of two furnished apartments, and were to decide between them in the morning. Mrs. Cawthorne, still precariously upright, suggested a theater after dinner, but collapsed relievedly when Sarah declared for bed. Sarah tucked her up and pretended to believe that she would go right to sleep, for a private drama awaited her in her own room, and she was in a fever to be alone with it.

The hotel bedroom, hard and bright, imper-

sonally luxurious, with the lights of the city stretched for crowded miles far beneath its one great plate-glass window, had for her a romantic charm that would in itself have been drama enough, once the door was shut; and yet it was only the setting for the coming adventure. For Richard Dockery and Virginia, his daughter, mourned as dead, had been given another chance at life. Sarah took out the manuscript as she might have lifted the curtain that had hidden their last rest.

For two hours she read—only it was not like reading; it was like running, and loving, and laughing, and crying, and the warmth of kind arms across happy shoulders. Such a father and daughter, merry-hearted, teasing, unfathomably tender, perfect in loyalty, glad of each other every good morning and no less close when the shadowy lover had broken his difficult way in—how could their tale be trash! Mr. Cawthorne knew literature, but was it perhaps true that, as her mother had said, he did not know hearts?

“I must find out,” Sarah said aloud, and pretended to hesitate, but she had known by the fifth chapter what she was going to do. Chris-

topher Saxe had told her to write out her dreams and send them to him. The book was his doing, and he must judge.

She wrote a bald note:

"My father says this is trash and my mother thinks it is beautiful. My father is probably right, but I must give it one more chance. Will you read it and tell me the truth? You offered to, once. You came into our garden in a high wind. Perhaps you have forgotten—but I must know."

Then she addressed the parcel to Christopher Saxe, University Club, and sent it by a messenger. If Mr. Saxe was not in town, it was to be brought back. For an hour she stood at the window or wandered about the room, afraid it would come back, afraid that it would not. When at last she put out her light, she saw that there was a line of light under Mrs. Cawthorne's door, but she could not go and offer soothing services. Life was too richly, madly exciting!

By her mother's face, in the morning, Sarah knew that their flight was over; the ancient habit had beaten her wrath, and her eyes were harassed, guilty. Yet she still kept the flag of revolt flying.

"Bunny, darling, I am a rag," she said gaily.



"We can't go back to those apartments this morning, but I don't believe any one will snatch them. You can go out by yourself and cruise about, if you like. I think I can sleep. You might look up the addresses on Pacific Avenue."

She talked on, defying the truth, and Sarah tried to make cheerful answer; but telling herself that she had foreseen it all along could not lighten her disappointment. Yesterday she had known that escape was impossible, but to-day it seemed as though she had missed it by a hair's breadth. She made her mother comfortable and sent for breakfast, meeting her insistent good spirits with a courteous sweetness that was more touching than she knew. Mrs. Cawthorne, in the middle of a laugh, suddenly covered her eyes, which were drowned in tears.

"I tried, darling—I did try," she stammered. "If I weren't such a fool, I could do it. But that poor old man, all alone—he would die before he would say that he minded it, but all night long I have seen him, so gray and bleak and forsaken! I can't bear it, dear—I can't."

"I know—I understand. I knew it yesterday, before you did."

"But, Sarah, you shall have it!" She caught

the girl's hand, pulling her down beside her on the bed. "Now let us be sensible and practical and see how we can manage it for you. There is your Cousin Frances; but that is an elderly household, and she hasn't much room. If only your Aunt Sadi lived here! You don't remember her, do you? She is so full of life and energy. If she should invite you—"

Sarah's hand stopped the eager flow. "Mother, dear! If I left you alone, don't you know what I should see in the night? And hear?"

"Ah, you darling! But what if I do scream now and then? It isn't a killing matter."

Sarah kissed her and rose. "We will take an afternoon boat back," she said. "But I make one condition, mother."

"Anything!" Mrs. Cawthorne's eagerness betrayed the welling relief in her soul.

"That you don't give up Doctor Robert." Sarah's color deepened, but she would not be stopped by that. "I believe he can do you good; and I won't stand having him forbidden the house. That is a solemn condition."

"Yes, dear! But he can leave the car outside, don't you think? We might concede that?"

Sarah had to smile. "Yes; we will concede that."

Mrs. Cawthorne settled down into her pillows with a long breath of peace. "Send away the tray, darling, and lower the shade," she murmured. "Ah, you are such a dear—"

Sarah presently went down the steep streets into the thick of the city. The sun had lost its summer glare and the trade winds were stilled; a ripe October beauty rose like a mist from every amethyst shadow, and the bay spread a sapphire band across every vista. It was a setting for life and love and people to wrench the heart of a prisoner on parole. Sarah could not remember Richard Dockery now, or last night's bold venture; a book seemed a small matter beside the chance at life that she had missed.

She looked into the morning faces she passed and at the happy crowds on the dummies: they were all in twos and threes, girls going shopping together, young women with very clean babies, men hurrying to meet other men with a wave for passing friends, married couples from other cities—everybody had some one, even to a pig-tailed Chinaman with his little pink silk son by the hand. Only Sarah went alone.

She sat down in a square in the heart of town, between the hotels and the shops, feeling as she used to feel when the party went on about her and she could not find the way in. There were lonely people on the other benches, lonely, shabby, discouraged people slouched down under their hat brims, looking on at the spectacle of prosperous life, but their longings, though different, were no fiercer than Sarah's.

"I want a friend! Send me a girl friend!" She could have cried it aloud to the crowded square; and at last, as though in answer, the passing stream revealed a swirl of red-gold hair under a dark blue toque and a cool efficient personality looking out through eyelashes that had once been too light, but that had becomingly and most adroitly browned since the Warrens had moved to the city.

Sarah started to her feet.

"Dosia Warren!"

Dosia looked puzzled for an instant, then she smiled as an older person smiles at something quaint and young.

"Why, Sarah Cawthorne!" Her handshake was impersonally kind rather than friendly, just as her championship had been, a dozen

years ago, but Sarah was too happy to discriminate. "You grew up, didn't you! I supposed you were still a romantic little girl inside a big evergreen hedge."

"Yes, I am afraid I am," said Sarah ruefully. "I don't feel half as grown up as you look, Dosia!"

Dosia laughed. Sarah could always catch her attention and make her laugh, for she had never been as shy with Dosia as she was with the other girls who had given parties years ago. That first defense had bred trust, and the term "duck," though dispassionately uttered, had echoed hearteningly in Sarah's ears. She had believed that she could have been "best friends" with the competent, experienced little girl if only Dosia had had time to give her a chance. They had both liked to talk about Life and Real Things, and Sarah could not understand that mental congeniality was not enough for Dosia. Even at thirteen that sophisticated little person had known who was "important" and who was not.

"Are you staying over here?" she asked as they walked on together.

"Just to-day." A sigh rose in Sarah's voice.



"I hoped we should take an apartment for the winter, but it isn't going to happen."

Dosia answered the tone. "Well, the first winter is rather deadly. You see, you don't lead anywhere. You can only ask people who know each other anyway, without you."

Sarah was puzzled. "But won't they come to see you?"

"Oh, to a certain extent," Dosia conceded. "But not as they will if you lead to something new. It is the doors you open that make you count."

"Count," Sarah repeated worriedly. "Oh, Dosey, I don't know what you mean by count!"

Dosia fairly pounced on the opening. Evidently her experience had been much thought over, and was ripe to deliver to an understanding ear. "You ought to before you move to the city. Our first winter was horrid. Then my Uncle Charley came back from Alaska and built a copy of the Trianon or something for himself and Aunt Clara—she ran a boarding-house up at Nome during their dark ages, and I believe he wanted to express that nothing was too good for her. It was then that I began to count. People were crazy to get into the Tria-



non—and not to stay there, but because it might lead somewhere still more exciting, and so on indefinitely. I could let them in, you see.”

Sarah stopped short in the center of a street and had to be pulled on to safety.

“But that isn’t what I want one bit!” she cried. “It’s friends—friends! Girls I can talk intimately with, like this—men who come to the house—young married women who take me up to the nursery—people, Dosey, people!”

“Ah, yes—the boys in for Sunday night supper—sing college songs and have lemonade—” Dosia was amused. “Go back to the village then, my dear; you won’t find that in cities. In a city you must count in some way; otherwise you only know people like yourself, who don’t know anybody or lead anywhere.”

“No, no, no!” Sarah was on fire. “You are making a game of it, with people for counters—all alike but for their place on the board. There’s nothing growing about that. It’s sport instead of crops!”

“But, you funny child, I much prefer sport to crops.”

“Not to live on, Dosey! Why, your heart would all wither up.”

"Oh—heart!"

"Yes, you have. Look how you always stand by other women—how you worked for suffrage and on the hospital board—oh, I've always heard of you as doing things like that. Why, that is the way we began—don't you remember? You went out of your way to stand by me. It was at my party."

"Oh, I do remember, vaguely—wasn't Bobby Russell lording it over you?" The picture amused Dosia. "I probably welcomed the chance to sit on Bobby! I'm still doing it. Do you ever see him?"

The name seemed to fill the earth with sweetness and resonance.

"Oh, yes," Sarah breathed. "Oh, don't you think he's splendid?"

Dosia sent a measuring look up into the lighted shadowy face, and communication was cut as though the hedge had risen up between them. She seemed immeasurably distant and superior.

"Oh, to look at—stunning. But he ought not to go in with his father; that is stupid. I intend to make him move over here presently." She stopped and put out her hand. "Now I

must jump on a car. I have a luncheon on, and two committee meetings. Nice to have seen you. Good-by!" And she was gone before Sarah could find a word.

The after effect of that brief meeting was a curious chill. Dosia had not said, "Come and see me;" perhaps that was why Sarah's step would drag as she went on up the hill alone. She did not at all mind Dosia's philosophy, since they were looking for such different things: Dosia wanted a complex social order while Sarah wanted only friends and, some day, a lover. Dosia had spoken as though she owned Robert Russell, but Sarah had known that there must be many other girls in his life; she asserted over and over that she was not so silly as to be hurt by that.

"Well, I had a girl to walk with, anyway," she said as she crossed the hotel lobby to get her key.

Some one had come in just after her, a tall, remarkably thin man, whose brown mustache spread out in a vain attempt to hide the creases in his lean cheeks, even while his kind little deep-set eyes smiled over the futility of trying to make anything appear other than what it

was. He held a familiar package under his arm, and the question in his glance was changed to a lighted certainty as Sarah turned.

"I thought so!" he said, putting out his hand.

The surprise was fortunate, for he caught a gleam of the real Sarah springing out to meet him as he never would have done if she had had to traverse long halls after hearing him announced. There was time for a revealing, "Oh, Mr. Saxe!" before the inevitable panic of shyness closed her up into a very composed and colorless young lady. A murmur about "most kind" would have discouraged a less discerning person.

"I want a talk with you. Have you time? Can't we sit down here somewhere?" The walls of the big lobby were lined with velvet couches, intended for knitting ladies listening to music, but deserted at this hour. He led the way to an isolated corner, and Sarah followed very much as she would have followed to the operating-room—pale, polite and silent. She was spared the torture of preliminary conversation; even when they were seated he seemed in no hurry to speak. He had rested an elbow on

the back of the couch, that he might face her, and Sarah, outwardly a good soldier, inwardly a shrinking, shrieking fugitive, drove herself to meet his look.

A smile was growing in his face, spreading up the lean creases, radiating out from the lines about his eyes, a smile that had the quality of an amused shout. It was not awestruck, perhaps, but it held no ridicule, and above all it was glad, heartily, generously glad. Sarah's panic was wiped out by a breathless wonder at what was coming.

"Some day," he began deliberately, "I hope to stand for something in the world—for an inch or two of work well done. But my real claim to glory will be that I discovered Sarah Cawthorne!"

He could not quite mean it the way it sounded; there was too much amusement in it. Sarah held herself very still, waiting.

"You asked me whether I agreed with your father or your mother;" he was suddenly serious. "They are both right; but your mother's verdict is the only one that matters. When your father said 'trash' he meant that it was unreal, that it couldn't happen, that such peo-

ple and such a relation never grew on land or sea. That is true."

"But why couldn't they be like that?" Sarah burst in. "They only need love and gaiety enough. I believed every minute of it!"

"And that is why it is beautiful, and your mother is right," he said quickly. "You have written a fairy tale, believing in fairies—that isn't the way literature is made, but, dear Miss Cawthorne, it is what the world is panting for, tongue out. The public will simply lap it up!"

Sarah could not decide whether she was mortally hurt or gloriously exalted. For all her modesty, she had had glimpses of soaring possibilities, and to accept success on this lower plane meant a moment of humiliation. Perhaps he recognized this, for he went on with increasing earnestness:

"And it is so splendidly worth doing. You will give pleasure and rest and diversion to tired and troubled people all over the land. Why, take a battered, unillusioned old newspaper hack like me;" his smile begged her to believe in the reality of the comfort he offered. "I happened to be at the club when it came, and I took it home with me, meaning to read it in



a day or two, for I was dog tired; but after a first glance I didn't put it down until it was finished. And I came out of it warmed and stirred, and wishing to heaven that I had a daughter like that!" They laughed together, and the comfort began to glow through Sarah's chilled being. After all, that was good enough for her to do! "You will make people believe in your visions for a moment or two, and perhaps that will leave them just a little warmer and kinder," he concluded. "Isn't that worth doing?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, if I could!"

"Now I have taken the liberty of indicating some changes." He moved nearer to her, opening the package on his knee. "It doesn't need rewriting—your sentences are always alive and charming; but in places the material could be handled better. May I show you what I mean?"

He must have spent hours over the text, and the result was for Sarah a priceless lesson in construction. His points were luminous for her; she seemed to leap forward in knowledge of her trade. Her eager understanding finally made him cry out in protest.

"It won't do—you mustn't be so frightfully clever! First thing you know, you will learn too much and spoil your fairy tales." He closed the manuscript with a slap. "Your whole future lies in keeping your dreams intact. Go back inside your hedge, little girl—keep away from real life as you'd avoid smallpox."

"Ah, but I don't want to," Sarah exclaimed. "If I gave up longing for real life—life and people—why, I should be so desolate, I couldn't even dream."

"Oh, long for them—that is all right—longing is the mother of the fairy tale; but the good God keep you from finding them!" Then he happened to see a clock, and started to his feet. "I must run. May I look at it again when you have worked it over? Will you send me word and let me come to see you?"

"But it is so far for you. I could come—"

"No, no—let me get inside that wonderful hedge again before I die of noise!" He had her hand, and, seeing how ablaze he had set her, he laughed a little, giving it another shake. "Oh, your dreams are safe enough for a while yet," he admitted. "Let me come soon. We

want to get *Dickery Dock* into the early spring list of new publications, don't we?"

"Oh, I do thank you!" Sarah said from her big heart.

She told her mother all about it, sitting on the side of the bed, and so brimming with good spirits that Mrs. Cawthorne presently got up and dressed and announced an appetite. She could always be raised or prostrated by the family mood. She was inclined to resent Mr. Saxe's criticisms on the inspired text.

"He hasn't proved that he can write so much better himself," she declared, ruffling like a mother hen.

"Oh, he knows!" Sarah sang. "Let us hurry home, mother; I want to get to work!"

Mr. Cawthorne, for the moment, had been almost forgotten; but as they neared home his shadow grew longer and longer, until it had quite swallowed up his wife.

"I really did say dreadful things to him, Bunny," she confessed. "Why, I never flew at him so in my life. He hadn't a chance to say a word back. That poor old man—he must have been so astonished. I don't know what he will say now."

Sarah's heart was stout enough for anything with *Dickery Dock* pressed against it.

"Well, he has won," she said blithely. "Here we are, trailing home again. He can afford to be generous this time."

"I hope he will think of that." Mrs. Cawthorne's sigh was dubious. "You know, Bunny," she went on presently, "there are very few men as generous as your father about money. He never has cared about it in the least. I didn't want him to make over so much to me when we married, and I remember so well the way he answered: 'It will spare us ever having to t-t-talk about the d-damn thing.' " There was a spark of laughter, quickly extinguished. "I have never used it to go against him before; and that was one reason why I couldn't go on. It seemed too contemptible! But you want to remember that about your father, dear. With some men, it's 'What did you do with the seventy-five cents I gave you a week ago Friday?' I don't see how their wives bear it."

Sarah privately thought that if Mr. Cawthorne had earned his comfortable property instead of inheriting it, he might have been less

indifferent, but her mother was bent on piling up his excellences, and she offered no resistance. Before the gap in the hedge was passed Mrs. Cawthorne had recalled a score of lovable traits and acts, laying them like faggots on a wavering blaze that was to see her through a dark night. Her white dread as they mounted the steps shook Sarah's sensitive body, in spite of her mind's superior stand. She longed to saunter in indifferently, and the consciousness of their scared and abject entrance filled her with wrathful mortification.

"Coming back is rather flat, and we can't play it isn't," she admitted; "but, anyway, I have *Dickery Dock!*"

The library door was shut, and the sounds of their entrance and Nelly's greeting did not open it. Mrs. Cawthorne walked herself up to the knob, then enacted a change of mind based on wiser second thoughts.

"After all, dinner time will be soon enough," she murmured, and slipped up the stairs as though pursued.

Sarah let her escape, then tapped on the door and opened it. There was a grim pleasure in defying her own reluctant spirit; it



gave her the level look of a rider who conquers an unruly steed.

"We're back, father," she began.

Mr. Cawthorne lifted the reluctant eyes of an aloof and patient scholar whose family was growing wearisomely intrusive.

"So I see," he observed. "But wouldn't the good news have kept till dinner time? I happen to be very busy."

It was impossible not to flush, almost impossible not to apologize and back out. Sarah, realizing that she had nearly been thrown, tightened her rein and her caution.

"I am sorry to interrupt," she said with grave courtesy, "but I have to say two things. One is that mother has given up going to the city for the winter. She wants to, but she finds that leaving you alone worries her more than it is worth." There was not a flicker of change in Mr. Cawthorne's face, but Sarah believed that she saw his body relax, as though he sat more easily in his chair. Her curiosity suddenly sprang out in a question, as startling to herself as it was to him: "Are you glad or sorry?" she asked.

At first he obviously had no intention of an-



swering. Then the straight honesty of it, or her cool wait, had its effect. His eyes showed a gleam of their habitual amusement.

"I don't like changes," he drawled. "And your mother is not a disturbing person to have about. At least, not usually." He remembered yesterday and the smile vanished. "And now number two?" he suggested, dipping his pen.

Two was harder; Sarah rode at it with a rush.

"She is not going to give up young Doctor Russell. She—and I—won't stand that."

The pen descended on the sheet. "Well, keep him out of here, then," he said indifferently, and Sarah found herself on the other side of the door, dismounting with shaking knees and very short of breath.

Mr. Cawthorne came out at dinner time, seemingly unaware that a revolt had begun and ended, and Mrs. Cawthorne was happy to be let off on any basis, but Sarah found his imperturbability hard to bear. Though the revolt had collapsed, he had met with a serious reverse himself, and it was unfair to act impregnable! She wished that her mother would not reveal so openly the completeness of her surrender;

but Mrs. Cawthorne knew nothing of making terms. She had hurt her poor old man and was not being punished for it, and she could only brim over with gaiety until she brought on a headache of sheer happiness and had to go to bed. As she passed her husband's chair, she put a hand on his shoulder and kissed his cheek. He appeared unaware of the little act, offering no least response, and yet her happy brightness was undimmed. Sarah, looking on, had a startled conviction of ignorance.

"I have been living with them all my life, and mother tells me everything—and yet perhaps I don't know how it really is between them," she thought it out.

Doctor Robert, not dreaming how he had been fought and bled for, dropped in that evening, unprofessionally.

"I would have called up to ask if I might, but you don't seem to have a telephone," he apologized; but he had come down the long room with no visible doubt of his being welcome.

All the Cawthorne rooms were huge, ponderous with old furniture, and Sarah, rising against the firelight, had made a slim and girl-

ish silhouette. The lamp at her elbow left the greater part of the room in shadow, and he was close to her before he could see her lifted face. "A great deal happens to me!" it was saying, and though he could not read the words, Robert basked in their light. *Dickory Dock* had lain in her lap, and she let it drop back there, thrilled with the hope that he would ask about it.

"My mother has gone to bed," she said. "We have been having adventures, Robert—we tried to take your prescription. We actually went to the city and hunted apartments."

"That's one thing I came in about;" Robert had brought addresses, but she would not look at them.

"It is perfectly clear and simple from the outside—we want to go, and ought to go; but if you were on the inside, you would see that we can't," she explained.

Robert settled back in his chair, took a purple silk ankle into an easy clasp and smiled at her with royal indulgence.

"There is no such word as 'can't' to your doctor," he said with the disciplinary nod that Sarah loved. It did something inexplicable and

quite delicious to her, so that she hated to keep on arguing; though in this case she really had to.

"But, no matter how much you tell your doctor, he is still on the outside," she pleaded. "You can't get everything over to him. Why, Robert, you would have to come and live in this family for twenty years to understand exactly why we can't do the simple wise thing of walking out."

"Why you think you can't," he corrected her. "If I came and lived in this family"—he paused to smile to himself over some idea—"I stake my professional reputation that in six months the hedge would be down, you'd have a telephone and a car and a dog, your mother would be a fairly well woman, and your father would be—waking up. I'd take you in hand!"

It was misery not to yield to his splendid sureness. Every bit of her being longed to, except her intractable brain, which hurt and mortified her by knowing better.

"We are so tied together," she said apologetically. "Tied by feelings we hardly know ourselves. I think I could learn to telephone, quite happily, in my father's house, but my poor

little mother couldn't. And feelings are as vital as spines, aren't they?"

Only at a bedside did Robert really listen. He gave his outer ears courteously enough, not his attention.

"Now I will tell you about a case I had, where the lady thought she couldn't," he began, settling down into deeper comfort. Sarah was a magic listener; her very soul seemed to come out to hear. Under the stimulus of her shining response, Robert went on and on. He had been entirely right in every case, and Sarah, rejoicing, piled up in her memory the list of his triumphs, as though she might need it to confound some future critic. They had both had a beautiful time when at last he rose. He had not noticed *Diokery Dock*, but that could wait.

"A man has called on me!" Sarah told herself, with a leap of the blood. "And it was *Robert!*" The thought gleamed through her pretty composure, and Robert lingered, resting an elbow on the mantelpiece and smiling at her very contentedly.

"I am not strong for the hedge," he said, "and yet, by George, Sarah, it has given you

something that the modern girl hasn't got. You are more of a lady, if you know what I mean."

"More of a stick!" said Sarah, with a laugh of forgiveness in case he should remember; but the word said nothing to Robert. "I met Dosia Warren in the city, and oh, she was so grown up and finished and sure of her way! She made me feel like a blundering little girl. I hate my hedge qualities, Robert."

The mention of Dosia's name brought a faintly uneasy frown. An elephant is said to fear a mouse. Robert was not diminished, but he was bothered.

"Dosey Warren does think she knows it all," he said, just as he had a dozen years before. "She's a clever girl, and I like her, but you can't teach her anything. She even wants to tell me how to be a doctor!" He drew up one shoulder, then the other, in subtle comment. "She has got all the modern patter about woman's place in the sun. Doctors have to hear a lot of that, but if girls only realized how it impresses us, they would drop it, I can tell you."

"But things are changing for women;" Sarah spoke with reluctant honesty. "I read



books about it, Robert, and—and I believe in it. I can't help it."

"Read all you like;" he was benignant. "It won't hurt you. You are what I call womanly, if you know what I mean. It pleases me."

Sarah's joy missed a beat, but she was too loyal to the dream-Robert to acknowledge it.

"We are going to be friends," she said gladly, and then, with her hand in his, a strange thing happened: she seemed to be swept by a mighty wind that isolated them together, rushing about them like a living wall, and through its confusion to hear a voice saying that they would be far more than friends. It was over in an instant, and she had drawn away her hand before Robert could have known that it trembled. He had not spoken; he had only looked at her with a blind fixity.

"And so we are not going to the city; but you must do what you can for my mother here," Sarah concluded, as though they had never left the topic.

"It doesn't give me a proper chance," Robert objected. They were walking slowly down the room together. "Perhaps, if I had another talk with Mr. Cawthorne—"

She almost clutched him. There was no laughter in her fright.

"Oh, Robert, you must let him alone! Talking with him only makes things worse. And you must leave your car outside, as your father does. I agreed to that!"

He might have seen how he had been battled for if he had not been so concerned with his own professional dignity. "Under the circumstances, I think I must give up the case," he said stiffly.

"Oh, no! Please, no!" The very gap in the hedge seemed to be closing, and she cried out, forgetting for once in her life the library door across the hall. Her uplifted face showed all her distress, as candidly as it might have a dozen years ago, when it slipped like a young crescent moon between two long falls of dark hair. "You have helped her already—you can't give her up now," she cried, her palms pressed tightly together against her dropping chest. "Ah, come in often and see her, talk to her, find little ways to help her. We do believe in your advice, Robert. It is only that our lives are swallowed whole, and we are helpless."

His dignity had melted, leaving him very

kind. "I only want to rescue you," he said. "And I mean to. I will go slowly if you say so. But I do hate an egotist! We doctors have to get the better of most of our prejudices, but an egotist rouses the old Adam in me. It's an idiosyncrasy, I suppose. I can overlook worse things—that's the funny part of it. Of course, we see the cranky side of human nature—that's all right, we expect to. But when I meet a man who's got an overdose of ego in his cosmos and doesn't know it—What is it? Sarah, what is the matter?"

She had shrunk back, as though from him, but, following her eyes, he saw that the door across the hall stood open. The room might have been empty; from where they stood, they could see no one; yet the door seemed to stir, as though it had only just settled back.

"Well, good night!" Sarah urged. Robert, however, feared no man, and took a deliberate leave.

"A little straight truth won't hurt him," he murmured. "But if he is likely to make it unpleasant—"

"Oh, no—just go," Sarah breathed, and shut him out.

She tried to walk past the open door as though it were not concerned with her, but a sound within startled her into a look. Mr. Cawthorne stood under the chandelier, his hands in his pockets, his head thrown back, shaken with chuckling laughter. His half closed eyes seemed to be sending their mockery down his pointed beard at her as the crossed finger sweeps the pointing finger in a child's gesture of derision. In her astonishment, Sarah stopped short, but the little laughs bubbling up through him almost prevented speech.

"Sarah, I t-take it all back," he stammered. "That young man is going to be the j-j-joy of my life. Have him in often!"

Sarah went swiftly on without answering. She had learned to resist his wrath, but she had no way of meeting his laughter. She could only hide from him her passion of anger.

## VI

SARAH worked so hard over her manuscript that in two weeks the revised *Dickery Dock* was ready for inspection; and then she had to face the trouble that had been hanging over her ever since that inspired hour with Christopher Saxe. She ought to ask him to dinner; it was not decent to let him come so far and not give him dinner; and how could any mortal understand that a girl who lived in a comfortable, well served home nevertheless could not ask him to dinner?

Suppose she did ask him and coolly told her father that he was coming—Sarah felt herself gallantly equal to that. The problem was, how could the meal be made anything but an ordeal? Mr. Cawthorne might not actively object to Mr. Saxe, but he would feel that his hedge was being attacked, and he would take measures to make every one so wretched that it could not occur again.

His methods were diabolically clever. When Robert was in the house now, comfortably holding forth to two contented women who loved to

hear him, Mr. Cawthorne would sometimes appear in the doorway and stand listening, his pointed beard tipped out, under his dropped lids an ecstasy of silent enjoyment. Robert never saw him, but Sarah's flush did not fade until long after the little gray man had gone. Secretly defying him, hating him, even, could not prevent his blighting the bright world and for the moment cleaving the Robert before her from the Robert of her daily dream. What would he do to Mr. Saxe?

She talked it over with her mother, who at first was very martial on the side of Sarah's rights, but presently dropped to a weak suggestion of tea—"Perhaps it really would be more sensible, dear!"

"But, mother, just look at it from the outside! It is silly, it's grotesque. This man is taking a lot of trouble to help me, and the most ordinary little courtesy in return—I won't give in like that! I will not!" Sarah did not often reveal herself so hotly, and Mrs. Cawthorne yielded at once.

"Write him, dear, for any night you please, and say that I urge his coming." She could go further. "Do you want me to tell—?"



Sarah kissed her and even laughed, a forlorn little laugh, her mother looked so solemnly prepared for the worst.

"Let us not take it so hard," she urged. "My friend is coming to dinner—that is all. Nothing very dreadful can happen. I will tell father when I hear from Mr. Saxe." And she went to write her note, humming to show how unmomentous it all was.

She asked him to come in the late afternoon to see the revised manuscript and "stay to dinner," as that seemed to make the meal less formidable, and he accepted in happy unconsciousness. Sarah left her father in peace until only a few hours separated him from this new rebellion. She even let him finish his lunch, though the suspense made eating physically impossible to her, and had driven her mother from the room.

"Father, Mr. Saxe is coming to dinner," she said casually as he was turning from the table.

Mr. Cawthorne stood in his tracks for a long moment before he spoke.

"And who the deuce is Mr. Saxe?" he drawled.

"He interviewed you once on the subject of

vocational education. We have become friends, and he is helping me with my writing." Sarah's fingers played careless scales on a chair back as she stood confronting him. "He is coming over from the city to work with me this afternoon, so it seemed only decent to ask him to stay to dinner."

She thought perhaps he meant to try her out with silence, his pause lasted so long, so she folded her arms and gave him back his look. "Remember—remember that your mind isn't afraid!" she was crying out under her grave composure.

"You know something about him, of course—and his antecedents?" Mr. Cawthorne began.

"Nothing whatever, except that he seems to me one of the nicest men I have ever met."

"Almost on a par with young Russell?" The lurking smile was a further test, but she met it triumphantly.

"They are both gentlemen," she said quietly.

Mr. Cawthorne turned away again. "Well, if he is as entertaining as my dear friend Robert, I shall welcome him," he said. "Couldn't you get R-R-Robert to come, too?"

Sarah made no answer, and, glancing back

from the doorway, he must have seen how white and rigid she was. His tone was suddenly indulgent.

"Ah, Sarah, if you had a sense of humor, you'd be a good deal more of a comfort to me," he sighed. "Even your mother has got it—I don't see how you escaped. Without that you really can't appreciate me."

"I am afraid I don't;" Sarah was politely regretful.

"I g-gathered that from your book." The memory of it put a gleam behind his glasses. "You pictured there your ideal, I take it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I may be wrong; but I strongly suspect that if a parent such as you have drawn could take off his bright wings and come to you on earth, in about one week you'd be shouting for the disagreeable old crank Cawthorne to take you back. He'd wear you out with his infernal gladness. Nothing in it, Sairy—take my word for it, nothing in it."

He limped away, and Sarah, dropping her face on her forearms, let the rare tears come. He stripped all the beauty from her world and gave her nothing to go on with, he was heart-

less, he was every bad word that she knew, and yet she was no longer angry. The charm he had for her had disarmed her, and her heart was crying, "Oh, why can't we love each other, why can't we make each other happy?" Sarah did not know how to love unless she could put out her arms.

How any physique could have stood the daily strain of Sarah's emotions would have been a mystery to one clever enough to see past her composure. All her developed self-control went to hiding them; she never dreamed of trying to live at a lower tension. The inside history of the three hours that preceded Mr. Saxe's coming would be credible only to another such girl. First the glory, the wild and secret singing; then the fear, fear of failing and disappointing him, the tortured memory of all the moments when she had been helpless and inadequate before some chance at life and so had seen it slip past as the motors slipped past the gap in the hedge; then the two feelings mixed, spurts of joy, stabs of fear, till the exhausted spirit settled down into cold bleak gloom, and an intelligent, highly educated young woman was longing to be taken seriously

ill, that she might escape the ordeal of greeting a visitor with whom she was not even in love.

"It really would be easier to die than it is to be me," she murmured, a hand at her trembling jaw, while Nelly was coming up with the card. Then, good soldier that she was, she walked down-stairs like any graceful young lady, prepared to make a very trite remark to the effect that it was good of him to come.

Mr. Saxe gave her no chance for formalities. He stood watching for her, eyes alight with mischief, his silence so full of suspended laughter that the greeting was left out altogether.

"I don't believe you will let me stay when you hear what I have just done," he began. "I had to do it—there was no choice. But you are going to hate me." He gave her a fair chance to withdraw her favor, but for the moment she did not even remember to withdraw her hand, she was so happy and so relieved. If people could always bring an excitement to bridge the meeting!

"Since you are really sorry—" she suggested.

"That is the worst of it—I'm not! I have saved your hedge."

"Saved the hedge?"

"With my two feet. I stamped out the busiest little fire you ever saw, in a patch of dead grass. Somebody's cigarette, I suppose. It was low and quiet, and it was streaking for that big, dry, fat, cypress wall. The wind was exactly right, and there was not a human being in sight. Now I ask you, man to man, what would you have done yourself?"

She tried to think that she would have been lawless, but gave it up with a little cry of laughter.

"Oh, I don't know! It is too hard. Why didn't you come another way?"

"There wasn't any other; it was right by the entrance. And, someway, it isn't in a man to leave a fire when he can stamp it out. I knew I was trampling on your heart's desire, but I had to act, Sarah Cawthorne. Can you forgive me?"

She played that it was very hard. "Oh, well, I dare say the gardener would have put it out with the hose," she said on a descending sigh. "Come and show me the place."

She threw on a cloak and they ran out into the chilly dusk and down the drive. Just outside there was a strip of blackened grass, running



almost under the edge of the hated barrier. The hedge loomed over them, untouched, three times their height and five feet thick, more like compressed green essence of tree than like individual trees. No branch showed, no twig slipped out to stir by itself. Secret passages might have wound through its dense sides undetected. The dryness that, following the first rains, had left the grass inflammable, had grayed its rich green with a film of dust, and spiders had sheeted it from top to bottom. Over the narrow entrance the two giant eucalyptus trees squared naked elbows, from which long tatters of bark flapped in the wind. Sarah's voice lost its laughter.

"Ah, it would have been left wide open," she said.

"But a telephone wire can get over it; and there you have the whole world within reach."

"No, it can't. We have no telephone." The admission always cost her a blush. She was childishly ashamed of it.

"No telephone—oh, bliss!"

He was smiling, teasing her, yet he meant it. Robert knew better. She heard him denouncing the abominable barrier with his fear-

less certainty, and her heart gave a leap for the young splendor of him, and for the shining mist of possibilities that lay along her horizon. Truly, a great deal happened to Sarah!

"I will tell you before I cut it down because I promised I would," she said; "but nothing you say will make any difference. I know what I want."

"There is a gap," he ventured. "One can at least walk out."

"No. When I leave my poor little mother, even for a few hours, something always happens to her." She looked up smiling, lighted. "We are a queer family, Mr. Saxe!"

He spoke as simply as though it were the most natural thing in the world to say: "You seem to me a very lovely person."

She wished she were. To be "lovely," the way he said it, sounded infinitely desirable. "Ah, you don't know me," she sighed.

"Oh, don't I! Reading *Dickery Dock* has been like spending a year in the country with you. You don't dream how intimate my side of our acquaintance is. I have to keep reminding myself that you have no such key to me, and that you must look on me as a stranger.

It is very hard to wait while you catch up, Sarah Cawthorne!"

She did like him! She needed no book written by him to tell her that he was all she longed for in a friend.

"I am not as far behind as you think," she said with a reserved little smile, turning back to the house.

They went in to the fire and a happy hour over the book. Mr. Saxe approved the changes and insisted that he should attend to its publication.

"I am getting out a book myself, so I know all about it," he explained. Her burning interest made him laugh. "Oh, nothing as delightful as *Dickery Dock!* A long dry work on journalism. I have a bee in my bonnet on that subject—what journalism could be. I have been working at the book for ten years—ever since I left college—and I dare say it will sell some nineteen copies. But at least it will be out of my system."

The ten years had left him lined and worn, good-humored about it, but unillusioned. He carried a flavor of travel, as though his study had led him into far lands and strange adven-

tures. Sarah wanted to know more with an eagerness that no one harboring a spark of youth could have resisted. So he told her of his father's newspaper in a Massachusetts town and of the ideas he had inherited as well as those he had quarried out for himself; of the fine old sheet's downfall after his father's death and of his pursuit of the idea through lean years of baffling experiences.

"And so that is the story of my life," he ended with a laugh at his own expansiveness. "I am sure Desdemona listened just as you do—held herself up like a golden bowl while the Moor poured on and on. I have told you all my dreams and desires except one."

"And that one—am I to ask?"

He showed her a bony wrist. "To get fat," he confided. "I live on cream and potatoes and all the stout ladies' forbidden fruits; I take no exercise; I laugh every chance I get—and look at me! I would give an argosy for a pound of flesh, any day. What can I do?"

"Perhaps, if you were to become very, very happy—" she suggested.

He liked that, liked it increasingly as his eyes rested on her.

"That is a beautiful idea," he said. "I will try to become very, very happy. If you tell me it is possible!"

"Oh, it is always just around the corner," Sarah assured him.

Mrs. Cawthorne came in, and Sarah had to remember that dinner was before them; but for the moment she was outside the hedge, and the prospect did not seem very formidable. Mrs. Cawthorne's gaiety, her curled hair and her vivid enjoyment of the stranger, made the girl smile as though she had been the mother.

"Dinner is served," said Nelly, and passed on to the library door.

It was, after all, a distinguished scholar that came out, and Mr. Saxe greeted him as such, with respect and liking; but Mr. Cawthorne, who had expanded liberally on the morning of the interview, seemed now to have lost his tongue. He gave the visitor a limp hand and a glazed eye, and shuffled to the table as though he were a very old man. Mr. Saxe made several attempts to get into communication; he had evidently looked forward to the meeting, and brought topics on which he wanted light; but his host's hearing seemed to have failed

with his other powers, and nothing could distract him from the immediate business of his dinner. Sarah, reading surprise and pity in her guest's eyes, could have wept with anger and beaten her father with her two hands. She longed to cry out, "He is only bad!" But the courage had been stricken from her and she could scarcely word her pallid, constrained replies to the company's faithful efforts at conversation. Mrs. Cawthorne, at first, did better. If her husband's behavior enraged her, it also gave her a dreadful desire to laugh, and her gaiety stayed alight until Mr. Cawthorne made his second move.

It was very subtle: only a patient laying down of his fork after a first taste, the trying and abandoning of other dishes with the same silently borne repulsion, an occasional look thrown over his shoulder, as though the service dragged interminably. To Mrs. Cawthorne's sensitive nerves the food at once became tasteless, cold, ill chosen, and Nelly's waiting a torture. Not one of her own perceptions survived to deny the universal condemnation; she was all housekeeper, and a failure, and she no longer could even smile. The family unease



became a palpable current, a physical corrosion eating into sensitive organs and hollowing the cheer out of faltering voices. Mr. Saxe, after doing his gallant best with no real help, looked from the father's bent head to the mother's strained absent face, then straight into Sarah's eyes with a grave question. It was so kind and direct, so free from small criticism or conventional pretense that it gathered her up like a strong arm and placed her beside him, unafraid and equal to anything.

"Dinner is very good—don't you think so?" she asked, and her voice had a new note, as though she had grown up another year or two since they had sat down. "My mother is troubled because my father is not eating, but I think the dinner is tremendously good, don't you?"

He did not understand all that he had done, but he welcomed the new move with quick appreciation.

"You don't half know how good it is—you can't," he exclaimed. "You probably have this cooking every day; it is a matter of course to you. Mrs. Cawthorne, if you knew what it is to live between a boarding-house and a club, you would insist on my having more pudding.

You would know that my refusal was only manners."

Mrs. Cawthorne's response was magic, and stimulated them to fresh daring.

"I would have taken another browned potato if you had," Sarah said.

"Words can't express how I wanted it. It is the concentrated essence of home, a potato roasted with the meat. I could have cried homesick tears over mine."

"Ah, and I thought they were cold or something; that is why I didn't urge you." Mrs. Cawthorne was shining and comforted, and Sarah became wickeder than she had ever been in her life.

"Very old people are cranky about food," she said clearly. "Oh, my father doesn't hear a word we say, Mr. Saxe; we can talk freely before him."

"Sarah!" gasped her mother, but Sarah had serenely gone on.

"Did you have a homy home when you were little—fried mush and pillow fights and baked apples and gingerbread and backgammon?" Sarah had not had a homy home, but she had read and dreamed of them until she knew their ways by heart.

His laugh was deep with feeling. "Oh, just exactly that! And seventeen kid cousins all over the place on Saturdays, and my own printing press in the woodshed!"

"I had a party once in my childhood;" Sarah's cheeks were aflame, but her voice only laughed. "My father never knew about it—not till this day, for it would have disturbed him. He went away overnight, so we had in twenty children, and oh, it was so wonderful!" She was looking back on the dream party, the party of her poem. "We played games and had prizes and ice-cream—I wish you had come to it."

"I am afraid I was editing the Yale Lit. about then—but you make me feel as if I had missed the event of my life. Couldn't you give another?"

"Yes," said Sarah. "When *Dickery Dock* is published, we will have another."

She rose from the table, followed by an overwhelmed and rather scared mother, but, as Mr. Saxe would have accompanied them, the silent host suddenly found his tongue.

"Stay and have a cigar with me," he said suavely, and Mr. Saxe obeyed.

The door was not shut, and from the drawing-room they could hear the two men's voices, quickening with interest. At first Saxe spoke with a careful distinctness, but he very soon forgot the supposed deafness. It was years since Mr. Cawthorne had so exerted himself; all his scholarship, the biting humor that had made his classes famous, were placed freely at the disposal of this strange young man. Saxe took eager advantage, as though his intellectual hunger were not often satisfied, but fear of tiring the old gentleman finally made him rise before he had received the hint. Mr. Cawthorne had a mysterious power of clearing a room. Outwardly he did nothing; Sarah had decided that it was the way he looked at the backs of his hands.

Mrs. Cawthorne had gone up-stairs, spent with excitement, and perhaps not sorry, kind American mother that she was, to let her daughter have the visitor to herself. He listened absently to the apology she had left, his eyes fixed on Sarah with a musing smile.

"You certainly are, as you said, a strange family," he admitted; "but I like you—oh, enormously. There's a flavor, and a distinc-

tion—your father is a remarkable man when he wants to be.”

“Exactly,” said Sarah, and they laughed, drawing their two chairs close to the hearth. “Isn’t it queer not to want to be, all the time?” she went on. “I was born wanting to be good—weren’t you?”

He gave the question sober consideration. “No; I was born wanting other people to be good while I stood over them and told them how,” he decided. “I should have been a virulent and obnoxious reformer if my mother hadn’t slipped into my cradle her sense of the ridiculous. It’s a devastating thing, that sense. I launch my thunderbolt at modern journalism, but all the time I see a thin gentleman, very excited, turning a pea-shooter on the Overland Limited. A reformer must not know how he appears. It’s fatal.”

“But a reformer who did know wouldn’t antagonize so many people.”

“My dear girl, antagonism is the harrow and the plow, it is what makes reform live. Attacked, reform has to prove itself, and it grows lusty in the process. My book will be three times as effectual if it makes some of its critics

so hopping mad that they'll attack it. Don't be afraid of a fight."

She thought of how she had fought that night, and shivered. "Oh, I want pleasantness," she cried; "warmth and love and pleasantness. All round me tight!"

"They will always be where you are," he said, "but, just the same, isn't it your hurts that give you ideas? Longings that are denied blossom into *Dickery Docks*."

"Longings that weren't denied would blossom into far, far better things. Being hurt may give you ideas, but being blessed—oh, that might give you wings! I'd like to try it, anyway."

"I don't believe in it for you, but I would give it to you if I could—just to see your eyes shine." He said things like that so simply that they could not make even Sarah shy. "I should like to bring you happiness in great boxes, like roses, and watch you open it." The roses seemed to be there, between them, and he might have thought it was their glow that was suddenly reflected in her lifted face; but she was looking past him, for a big and strikingly good-looking man was coming down the long room.



"Robert!" she said, and as she murmured an introduction, Saxe's desire to see her eyes shine was liberally granted. Robert greeted the stranger with a well disposed sovereign's cordiality, and as the two men stood together, speaking of the fog that had rolled up from the bay since the wind dropped, Sarah looked from one to the other with the thrilled cry in her heart—"They're getting in!" Mr. Saxe was not a bit good-looking; beside the glorious Robert, his face appeared fleshless and even, just now, a little grim; but, oh, he was a wonderful friend! And Robert was romance embodied. Daily the gap in the hedge was widening.

"If the boats are being delayed, I ought to start for home," Saxe said, and yet he lingered, as though the foggy bay was a bleak prospect. Robert took the bright center of the hearth rug, looking down on Sarah, but kindly including Saxe.

"This is the first moment I have had to breathe since breakfast," he announced. "We busy physicians lead a dog's life, Mr. Saxe. We belong to everybody. Sarah, your not having a telephone has its advantages. When I was leaving the house, the maid asked the

usual, 'Where can you be reached?' and I said, 'I can't be!' Then I ran." He laughed, success and satisfaction in every line of his pleasant person, and Sarah's happiness bubbled over in an answering laugh. Her glance went on to Mr. Saxe to see if he too felt the sunny charm of the moment, but his averted face was in shadow and told nothing. "It is like touching base to come here," Robert went on. "Can't be tagged. Of course, when I can't come because I am expecting to be called, that's another story." He laughed again, enjoying his own discomfiture, enjoying everything that concerned him. The general radiance lit in Sarah a startling impulse to stand close beside him, her head against his big shoulder—but with a hand out to Mr. Saxe, who looked rather lost and lonely in the shadow.

"Please both sit down," she urged. "You make me feel that you are going, and I do so like having you here!"

"I'm afraid I have to go rather soon," Robert took Saxe's former chair, stretching himself out luxuriously to the fire. "A man who works as hard as I do has to get his full night's sleep. It's a curious thing—I find I need ex-

actly eight hours. If a man can do his best on less, I tell him, 'All right, go ahead, take seven or six or any amount that suits your individual constitution. Me, I need eight.' We doctors can't always get what we need; I can be up a whole night and you would never know it; but I'm not at my hair-trigger best, and I know it, I can tell you. How much do you take, Mr. Saxe?"

Mr. Saxe was looking suddenly cheered and lighted; but perhaps it was only because Robert's shadow had withdrawn itself.

"Oh, I am a newspaper man. I get what I can, where I can—I never add it up. The total would be too appallingly small." He came over to Sarah, his hand out. "I don't dare sit down. I am on my last pint of gas—I mean, manly resolution, and it has got to run me to the boat." He held her hand warmly, closely, not shaking it, but smiling down into her eyes as though he still had a splendid reserve of what he called "gas." "I am going to take the child—we settled that, didn't we? I shall bring you a contract to sign in a very little while." He put the manuscript under his arm and held out a cordial hand to Robert. "I am glad to

have met you, Doctor Russell," he said with a ring in his voice that brought Robert up for a hearty answer.

"I like that man," he announced, when Saxe had gone. "It's funny—I take to people or I don't in the first two minutes. That settles it. Remember how it was at your party, years ago? We were friends right straight off. Remember it?"

"Oh, do I!" It was a mere breath, a sigh for memories almost unbearably poignant, and Robert did not hear.

"Well, you were a little thing; you wouldn't remember as I do. You were rather shy, I think. I know I told a story or two and sort of helped you out. We must have danced together half the evening."

He did not really remember, after all; for they had not danced at Sarah's party, except for the Virginia reel. She was so absurdly hurt that she had to turn away from the subject.

"I am glad you liked Mr. Saxe," she said hurriedly. "He is helping me with—Robert, shall I tell you a secret?"

"Go on," he encouraged her.

"I have written a book. Not a real serious novel, of course, just a little one, but Mr. Saxe thinks he can get it published. Perhaps I'm an author!" She opened her secret before him as though it had been Mr. Saxe's box of roses, and looked for the response in his face, but she found there only a faint uneasiness.

"A book!" he repeated.

She thought he was afraid that she might be about to make a public fool of herself, and hastened to reassure him with unresentful sweetness.

"Oh, just a little story, Robert; nothing pretentious or that matters. Only it has been fun. And Mr. Saxe likes it. It's about a father and a daughter."

His listening had grown absent, as though his thoughts had been sent off in a new direction. "I mean to write books some day," he said with a clearing brow. "Plenty of the big medical men do. And they ought to. Now my idea is—" He settled deeper in his chair and his topic, a shapely hand pointing his meanings. If Sarah listened a little less devoutly than usual, he did not consciously realize it; but he presently became aware of the hour.

"Well, I must go," he said, and dragged himself up. "It's awfully sweet here, Sarah. I don't know a pleasanter place for a tired man to drop in." He had her hand, and again that strange thing happened, that sense of a rushing wind that swept about them, shutting them in together. Sarah had gone half-way down the room with him before she knew in words that he still held her hand. She drew it away, and, fearing that it had made him think less of her, she said a very composed and cool good night as a counter-balance. After he had gone she still stood in the doorway, looking out into the heavy darkness, asking hot troubled questions of the invisible stars.

Emotion subsiding, left, as always, dream. Oddly enough, the central figure was not, at first, Robert. The setting was Saxe's ferry boat, feeling its way through the blind fog. Crash and panic; Saxe was saving women and little children; then he was in the water, struggling alone.

"I'm coming—I'll help you!" she actually spoke the words, but was too intent on the scene to hear them. She was wrenching off a cabin door, and Robert was helping her. Now



they were on two doors lashed together, seizing Saxe as he went down for the last time, dragging him by main strength—

“Well, Sarah!” The living voice, breaking in on the intensity of her dream effort, nearly made Sarah scream with the shock. She shrank back, weak and trembling, her eyes fixed blindly on her father as he slowly advanced. She did not remember the unsettled score between them until he stood confronting her, a gleam behind his glasses.

“Well, father?” She stiffened for the combat, but wearily, and wishing that just this once she might be let off. That dinner table defiance seemed immeasurably distant.

“I said you hadn’t a sense of humor,” he drawled. “I take that back. It’s a queer sense of humor—it isn’t just like mine, and I don’t know if I wholly care for it. But it’s there, Sairy—it’s th-th-there!”

She looked at him from remote depths of emotional exhaustion, then closed the front door and turned to the stairs.

“That wasn’t a sense of humor, father; it was life and death,” she said over her shoulder.

## VII

CHRISTMAS was a difficult day in the Cawthorne household. Mr. Cawthorne never liked his presents. He did not say so, robustly, so as to give his family a chance to grow robust in return; he merely looked them over with a dry, "Much obliged!" that stung, or asked irritably what they were for. Sarah had argued for years that there was no sense in bothering him with gifts, and in January Mrs. Cawthorne always agreed, but by December her heart would fail her.

"It does seem too mean, when I have five presents for you, and you probably have seven for me," she insisted.

"Eight," said Sarah jubilantly.

She was making tea for her mother, whose enthusiasm in the matter of the five presents had left her very flat. Sarah had pulled her chintz couch to the fire, and the hour had a pleasant homy quality, a glow and gaiety such as she had put into every page of *Dickery Dock*. The driving rain against the windows made it unlikely that Robert would drop in, and though

his comings were the spring of all Sarah's new jubilation, there was sometimes a curious relief in knowing that he would not come—perhaps only because it left her free to go beyond the reach of the door-bell. The hedge had never imprisoned her so closely as did the fear of missing Robert.

"Eight beauties," she added, and their eyes met and laughed over the fun of presents.

"Well, one of mine for you has three things in it," her mother maintained.

"And two of mine are just little jokes," Sarah reassured her.

"I dare say Robert will send you flowers or something," Mrs. Cawthorne spoke happily, but without a trace of significance. She enjoyed Robert's attentions, welcoming them for Sarah as a girl's rights, and not dreaming of the tumult in the well hidden heart so close to hers.

"Do you really think so?" Sarah was sure of it, but she wanted to hear it again.

"I know it. Why, darling, he brought you candy on your birthday—don't you remember?"

Did she remember! Her mother's perfect unconsciousness sometimes frightened Sarah; it

seemed to suggest that the whole thing might be only one of her own iridescent imaginings, that went out like bubbles at the touch of reality. For all Robert's persistent coming, he never said anything that Sarah would have made a lover in a story say. It was only the way he looked at her, and that strange clashing confusion when he took her hand.

"I hope he will," she said with brave lightness.

"And Mr. Saxe, too," her mother piled it up. "How many times has he been over, Bunny?" Mischief glimmered in her eyes now, but Sarah did not notice.

"Oh, three or four times," she said obliviously. "Mother, men do all the giving, don't they? Girls don't even send them Christmas cards?"

"Oh, I don't know, dear. Perhaps not the first Christmas." She sighed. "Women like anything just because it is given them, but men are so disobliging about presents. Do help me with your father. His present hangs over me like bad news. Every morning, when I wake up, I think, 'What is that dreadful thing on my mind?'" She laughed at herself, but feebly.

"He did rather like the green leather footstool, darling. He used it, anyway. Haven't you thought of anything?"

"Mother, I have put my last inkstand at father's breakfast plate," was the firm answer. "If presents don't give pleasure, they are absurd. And it isn't as if he took any trouble over our Christmas. A gold piece each is very easy."

"But he always gets bright new ones from the bank, dear! And you can't tell—he may be hurt."

"Oh, I shall have it out with him beforehand." Sarah's courage had always a dash of romance: she met difficulty like a knight riding into the lists. "I shall simply tell him, with perfect candor and good humor—" A hand touched the door, and she stopped with guilty suddenness as Mr. Cawthorne came in.

"I thought I heard teacups," he said. "Give me some, Sarah. It is too dark to work and too early to light up."

He sat down and accepted his tea, but made no pretense of joining them; his thoughts held him in contented isolation. The fire blazed dutifully, but the ruddy glow that had irradiated

the hour was gone, and Sarah's resolution weakened. After all, it would be easier to buy him something than to have it out.

"There will be plenty to have out with him," she admitted. She had not yet faced the problem that life would present if Robert—Sarah always stopped there, between a gasp and a glow, and did something impetuously kind for her mother.

"Thank you, dear," said Mrs. Cawthorne absently as the slipping rug was replaced. Her eyes were on her husband's fine profile. "What are you thinking about, Stephen?" she asked.

He looked up with his most mellow smile. "About what a pretty girl you were when I first knew you," he drawled, and enjoyed at his leisure her silent astonishment. "Wasn't that what you wanted me to say?" he added. "Ladies always want something like that, don't they?"

"Not unless they are young enough to believe it," she said with a short sigh. "I really wasn't pretty," she presently went on. "I had a lot of vivacity and expression, but a photograph always found me out. My features were all put in wrong, and my chin was crooked, and I had such horrid thin shoulders."



"Well, I m-married you," he offered dryly, startling her into a laugh.

"You did," she admitted, and fell silent; but he was not left long to his own undivulged thoughts. "Stephen, do you remember the Christmas party at the Grants'?" That used to be a yearly question; Mrs. Cawthorne had to ask it when the breath of redwood wreaths was in the house; but Sarah had not heard it for a long time now. She knew all about that party, though it had happened many years before she came. Mr. Cawthorne's eyes, called back from the fire, had a patient glimmer for the incurable sentimentality of women.

"Young people used to waste a lot of time on parties," he observed generally. "I think the world has grown more sensible in that respect."

Mrs. Cawthorne laughed at him. "You mole! They are doing it much more; only you don't hear about it. How else can you throw young people together?"

"Why throw them together?"

"It is a need of youth and sex—you can't deny that."

He put down his cup and rose, rubbing a slow hand across his forehead. "Sex—sex?" he re-

peated. "Are they still bothering about that old boggy?"

They let him go without comment. At the door he looked back to leave a warning. "By the way, I hope no one's youth and sex will demand any more conversation in the hall. It is just as easy to talk somewhere else, isn't it? I would suggest the attic." The door closed on him, and Mrs. Cawthorne rose with the strength of exasperation.

"He ought to get a birch rod for Christmas," she declared.

"Oh, but think of the bleak dismalness of being like that!" Sarah cried. "No glow in life, no little affections and kindnesses, nothing leaping in one's blood! Why, mother, he seems to me the saddest little man in the whole world!"

"Now, Sarah!" Mrs. Cawthorne clutched the girl's wrist, and even shook it. "Being sorry for him has spoiled my life—don't you get sorry, too! Don't do it! He is a bad old man—you remember what your mother tells you! Don't you ever be sorry!" Her voice rang with warning; and then, as her own actual words came back to her, she broke into a wail of

laughter, her arms thrown about her child. "My dear, I am not an orthodox mother, I'm afraid," she apologized.

Sarah went down-stairs on Christmas morning with the familiar reluctance. She and her mother would have whole-heartedly exclaimed and embraced over their presents if they could have opened them alone together; but Mr. Cawthorne's way of looking on, as though at some quaint biological phenomenon, chilled the blood and took the reality out of grateful words. Sarah would have had the presents up-stairs, but her mother could not so openly give up the tradition that they were a family.

"And he does like to see the things," she reminded Sarah as they waited for him. "He always looks at everything. If we can do anything that interests him, Bunny—!"

Sarah was not listening. All her power of attention had fastened on a package laid at her plate, addressed in Robert's handwriting.

"I know I am foolish, but I can't help hoping he will like his lamp," Mrs. Cawthorne went on. "His old one is disreputable. Do you think he will use it?"

Sarah had slipped the fateful package into

her lap. "I wish I could have given Robert some little thing," she murmured.

"If we fill the lamp and light it—here he comes, dear!" And Mrs. Cawthorne straightened up valiantly to the ordeal. Her life did not lack drama.

Mr. Cawthorne had forgotten that it was Christmas, and went back for the two gold pieces, bright from the bank. He had put them in red boxes this year, and Mrs. Cawthorne found that touching. Then, settling down, he confronted his lamp with a hostile stare.

"Oh, very handsome, very good," he drawled. "Much obliged. I don't have to use it, do I?"

The worst had happened, as usual, and Mrs. Cawthorne accepted it without resentment. "I hoped you would, Stephen! Your old one is so shabby."

"I like it shabby. And I am used to the smell. I don't believe this would smell the same."

"It wouldn't smell at all!"

"I should miss that. I couldn't work as well. What is this, Sarah? Oh, a book-rack. Very pretty. Much obliged."

"It really isn't pretty;" Sarah spoke in her most polite voice. "I just bought any old thing."

"Sarah!" breathed her mother. Even her father looked surprised.

"You see, you don't care for presents," Sarah went on with a tranquillity that she felt to be superb; only her wrath over Mrs. Cawthorne's disappointment could have given her the power. "I used to worry and hunt and change things, as mother does—and be just as disappointed at the failure. Then I wanted to give it up—but that takes so much courage. Cold-blooded courage. So I simply made a Christmas gesture."

Mr. Cawthorne put down his emptied coffee cup with the familiar glimmer dawning in his eyes.

"You have too many youthful emotions, and one can't depend on your sense of humor," he observed, "but I sometimes think you have b-b-brains, Sairy."

This was the test—to stay grown up and quiet after the excitement of making her stand was over, to suppress all trembling resentment, the weakness of after-wrath. She met it triumphantly.

"I have a good right to them," she said with a little polite smile. He laughed aloud, so appreciatively that all her hostility melted, leaving

her with a new weakness to fight; for he could always awaken in her a girlish longing to love him.

"I don't care—I have Robert!" she told herself over and over, her hand caressing the hidden package. It seemed to answer her touch, just as Robert's hand always answered.

She would not open it until her father had left the room. When at last she was free to unwrap a white vellum Tennyson, two feet square, illustrated in water-colors, her beating heart drowned out any sound from her private judgment. She could have loved a red plush album that came "Wishing Sarah a Merry Christmas, from Robert;" whatever he did was divinely right. And Mrs. Cawthorne could be trusted to admire anything that one showed her with enthusiasm.

"But nothing from Mr. Saxe?" she asked disappointedly when she had said all that Sarah's joy demanded.

"Oh, Christmas isn't over," Sarah sang.

All day the song was in her voice or her exultant silence. A few first weak violets were out in the garden, and she hunted them until her fingers were numb from the cold wet leaves,



preparing incense for the moment that must come before the day was over. As though red-wood and violet were not enough, she threw a stick of eucalyptus on the fire when the tea hour struck its thrilling "Now!"

"Merry Christmas!" called a pleasant voice from the other end of the great room; and Sarah could not stay disappointed with Christopher Saxe holding her two hands, shedding down on her his abundant kindness. He really was the nicest man in the whole world—one might love Robert and still admit that! He had a florist's box under his arm.

"If I had sent them this morning, I couldn't have seen you open them," he said. "And I've another present for you that you'll like still better, but I am not going to give it to you yet."

"Oh, why not?" She was often shy and constrained with Robert, but never with Saxe. There was something in the way he liked her that gave her a magic security and freedom. "Oh, please—I am so happy anyway to-day—pile it up!"

His glance asked a grave question, but he spoke lightly. "Just Christmas-happy? Or happy in particular?"

"Oh, just life." She opened his box and cried out over its contents; orange blossoms and Maréchal Neil roses bedded in deep purple heliotrope. She brought water and arranged them, standing back like a painter from her effects; then she returned to him with a sigh of satisfaction. "What is the other present?"

"But, after you get it, you won't pay any more attention to me," he objected. "I shall be only so many feet of messenger. No. Sit down here and make a fuss over me for ten minutes. I need it, Sarah Cawthorne."

She looked into his face then, and, as he looked steadily back, something was revealed to her, something saddening, for which she did not know the words. She sat down beside him on the couch.

"I really don't know you very well," she said wistfully. "I think we always talk about me! All sorts of sad things may be happening to you and I not know them."

"No, they are not," he said quickly. "There is not a thing in my life that I wouldn't tell you, if you had patience to hear it. Only as a topic you are so much more interesting." He had smiled away the shadow, and she was glad to

forget it. "My one real trouble is that I have lost another pound—somewhere between here and the ferry."

"Running to catch it?"

"No; running to get here. You told me once how I might grow fat."

"Did I?"

"Yes. I was to become very, very happy." His eyes, fixed on her lighted face, begged for something, but she did not see.

"And aren't you?"

"No."

"You are spoiled," she reproved him. "You have had the freedom of the world—you haven't been shut up inside a hedge! You have had work and success, and known everything, and when you liked people, you could go after them—you didn't have to sit still till they broke their way in." The force of her old longing surged up in her deepened voice. "You have no right not to be very, very happy every day of your life!"

"Ah, my dear!" It was a mere breath, and the lifting and dropping of his hands completed it. Then he laughed at himself, shrugging away the moment. "You will be sorry you

scolded me when you see the other present," he said, suggestive fingers at his breast pocket.

"Need I wait any longer?"

"Well, then!"

He took from a long envelope a typewritten document. Sarah had gone as far as the party of the first part, named Sarah Cawthorne, and hereinafter to be referred to as "the Author," before understanding burst upon her.

"My book," she said breathlessly. "You have done it!" Her gratitude, her lovely manners, struggled against some overwhelming need. "Oh, I must just tell my mother!" she implored. A moment later she was flying up the stairs.

She came back a very composed and proper young author, with only the shining of her eyes to betray her, and thanked him with earnest formality. They took the contract to the desk for her signature.

"Sit down with great care," he urged as he pulled out the chair for her. "The least joggle and it would all burst out."

Her composure visibly trembled. "What would?"

"Your happy heart. You would jump up and down, you know; you might even throw your

arms about my neck." He had passed the hedge, as he always did; a peal of revealing laughter welcomed him.

"I wish I could," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Saxe, I really wish I could! I don't know how to thank you enough in plain words."

"I will tell you how;" his cheerfully matter-of-fact tone took all significance out of what might come. "Aren't you nearly ready to stop calling me Mr. Saxe? One can't do it until one is ready, of course, but I hope you don't think of me as Mr. Saxe. Do you?"

Sarah gave it candid reflection.

"No. I think of you as Christopher Saxe," she decided. "But Christopher isn't a very natural name to use, some way."

"Oh, I have never been called that."

"What did they call you at college?"

He looked down at his bony wrists with a rueful smile. "Skinny," he admitted.

Again her laugh rang out. "Oh, that wouldn't do. What do your sisters call you?"

"Bob. I don't know why. Oh, I believe it was Bobbin when I was a little fellow—some comment on my behavior."

Sarah did not like Bob. "The thing to do,"

she thought it out, "is to make Christopher into a natural and easy name because it means you. For instance, I never intend to name my gentle heroines Alice. I am going to make them so really gentle that I can call them Kate or Barbara without upsetting the impression. And I will call my violent ones Celia, if I like—or Effie! They will get the better of their names, just as we do in life." She folded the signed contract and gave it back to him. "Thank you, Christopher. Happy New Year, Christopher," she said.

"Happy New Year, Sarah," he returned. It sounded like, "God bless you, Sarah!" and, without knowing why, she found tears near her eyes. Then the voice of voices magically cleared them away.

"Merry Christmas!" called Robert from the doorway. "Oh, how are you, Saxe? Merry Christmas! Glad to see you. Did you get your present, Sarah? Did you like it?"

He had taken possession of them both, of the room, of the universe, and Sarah's eyes were shining up at him as the moon shines at her lord the sun; but she greeted him in reserved and gracious terms, like the perfect lady that



she was. She never squealed her pleasure at him, as other girls did, or grew intimate in her thanks, and Robert liked that. He had even more than the usual wariness that life teaches the good-looking, stalwart, well-born and prosperous male.

"I have been running a Christmas tree," he announced, alight with satisfaction and success. "I don't know why it is—people are always asking me to do things like that. I suppose because I don't mind making a goat of myself. It was at the Klondike Warrens'—you know, Sarah, Dosey Warren's uncle. They live in a sort of palace, copy of Versailles or something, and she had collected about fifty poor children, so I did the regulation thing—white beard, red clothes, sleigh-bells. It was good sport. I like kids—always did. I like to make them laugh. It is easy, of course—any one can; you only have to have a knack at jokes. I would pretend to read a name on a parcel: 'Heinrich Schlimpelhausen!' Of course, no one would come forward. Then I'd say, 'Oh, hold on, I've pronounced that name wrong. It's Neddy Smith!' That got them every time."

The duet of his and her laughter satisfied

him, but Sarah looked at Saxe to see why it had not been a trio. He was sunk back in his chair, looking fixedly at Robert over tented fingers. Robert's tale was only just begun, but suddenly Saxe interrupted.

"I was a Santa Claus once—though I hadn't any red clothes," he began. "It was in China. I was ostensibly looking up an article on Christmas in the Missions, though as a matter of fact I was on the trail of—something quite different." His dropped voice hinted at sinister experiences, and Sarah was torn between her longing to hear and an uneasy sense that this was not fair to Robert. Robert always had the center. That was one of the undisputed laws of the universe. He would be displeased if Saxe kept it too long. An anxious glance showed him as yet tolerant, even willing to hear; and then she actually forgot him, uplifting herself like Desdemona to receive Saxe's quiet tale. He had reached the Mission in the same hour with a whisper that it was to be attacked and burned when the native children had left the mission school that day.

"And so the point was that the children must not go until help could arrive; and that was

seven hours," he explained. "They must want to stay—we didn't dare show our hand by locking them in. By jove, I'll never forget those seventy little yellow moon faces lifted for the signal that school was over, while we discussed possibilities with an air of polite badinage. Then some one thought of the Christmas tree."

Sarah by this time was in the thick of the action. She helped drag in and set up the tree, she was flinging upon it anything on which she could lay her hands, suitable or absurd, she was marching the children round to happy music and leading them in games till the doors could be flung open, she was luring in the mothers who came to see why the children had not returned; then she was flying to the kitchen to start the improvised supper while Saxe began the distribution of the crazy presents.

"I haven't Russell's knack at jokes, but I had to be funny then or die—quite literally," he explained. "Any one can be funny under those circumstances. I was. I was frightfully funny. Largely in pantomime, too, for of course they didn't understand much. It takes a good deal to break up a little Chink's composure, but I did it. You couldn't have got them away. They

thought I was crazy, and that always appeals to an Oriental. Heavens, what we didn't give them! Kitchen utensils, brushes and combs, garters, old calendars, postage stamps, wedding rings, as well as all the raw materials of the presents they had been planning to make in the next ten days—and every one of us jumping a foot at any chance sound, and then being busier and merrier than ever. They never had such a Christmas. They say it put the Mission solidly on its feet for life. Half the local population was under our roof by the time the bully American blue-jackets came clomp, clomp, clomp, from the nearest railway station, and the neighbors decided that it wasn't a good season for killing missionaries. I couldn't write it up, for diplomatic reasons. Pity! I could have made a good page of it. But, somehow, I have never wanted to play Santa Clause since," he concluded.

Sarah, who was crying on the neck of a blue-jacket, had to know more. Quite unconsciously she had left her chair for a stool beside Saxe, and all her burning attention was fixed on him, but gradually a growing expression under his half dropped lids brought her back to con-

sciousness. The look was distinctly wicked: there was good-humored malice in it, unholy triumph. And so the spell was broken, and, turning her head, she saw that Robert sat aloof, looking abstractedly toward the ceiling and drumming on his chair back with patient fingers. That was catastrophe. She started up.

"I should prefer your Christmas tree, Robert," she exclaimed. "I wish I could have seen you. Did you make yourself big and burly?"

"Not especially," said Robert.

The case was even worse than she had feared. Sarah bent her whole heart to the task of cheering him, and secretly wondered that Saxe, usually so kind, made no effort to help her. Half a dozen warmly interested questions had been repelled before she happened on a successful one.

"Was Dosia there?"

"Oh, yes. She was running the affair. It was for her that I did it." That made Robert feel better; he expanded to the topic. "Dosey Warren has improved a lot lately. She's quieter, more womanly. She has learned to listen, if you know what I mean. She used to be the sort of girl that just waits for you to get

through so that she can jump in, and you couldn't tell her anything she didn't know. I suppose clever girls go through a sort of cocksure stage, and then, if there's anything to them, they get over it. She was really rather nice with the kids."

Robert was all good nature again, but Sarah looked grave and pale. Saxe rose with some remark about a boat to catch, but she was scarcely aware of his good night and his going. Robert, however, relaxed in his chair and forgave the world.

"Nice to be here," he said contentedly. "Funny—I always feel I've got home when I'm here with you."

Sarah's sky suddenly brightened. She could even smile a little.

"I'm a domestic sort of fellow, anyway," he went on. "You wouldn't expect it of a busy physician, on the go all the time, but there is nothing I like better than—oh, home, and all that sort of thing. You do, too, don't you?"

Sarah would have liked anything on earth that was suggested to her at that crisis. She quite forgot the hedge. They confided to each other their ideals of home, and marveled that



their tastes so coincided, and every moment the subterranean current was sweeping them closer and closer, until the final words seemed to await only the next meeting of their eyes. And yet, when Robert rose to go, they were still unspoken. He only held her hand a little more closely than usual, then went out in unhurried serenity, regally satisfied with things as they were. She stood for a long time where he had left her, then dropped her cheek to the hand that still vibrated. The house seemed very still and old and empty.

"I thought they asked you sooner," said poor Sarah.

Something was bound to come out of the hurts and delights of that momentous day, but Sarah had gone rather forlornly to bed before the healing comfort began to stir. At first she refused to heed it; she was tired and unhappy; she did not want to write. Ten minutes later she was sitting up, wrapped in a comfortable, a blank-book on her knee. A love scene was spinning itself before her fixed eyes, a gay, vibrant, man-and-woman duel; and the man was a real lover, who said all the things that woman would have him say, under the veil of lightness

and laughter that made them bearable; while the girl was a queen of hearts, elusive, mischievous, and yet patently ready to be deeply a woman when caught. It was an enchanting scene, occurring about two-thirds through the book that came into being with it; when at last Sarah's head dropped back, she knew that she had only to turn her pencil loose, and her lovers would build up between them the nicest love story in the whole world, the book of love-as-it-ought-to-be. When she woke up, hours later, the gas was blazing down on her scattered sheets as it had blazed years ago on her inspiration of "The Party," and again reality, caught and fixed in the dream, had been made beautiful. She put out the light, and turned to sleep again with her cheek on the hand through which Robert had spoken.

"Wasn't he dear!" she murmured. "Oh, isn't it all wonderful!"

## VIII

**T**HE new book consumed Sarah like an inner flame. She had found the door to delight, and she was seldom on the outer side of it. She never seemed to be making up the story. It was given her, poured into her for two or three hours at a time; then it was as abruptly cut off, and all the will in the world could not advance the tale one inch. Robert came and came, staying contented hours, but Sarah was no longer in a hurry for the words he never quite said. She could do them so much better by herself! Once or twice she was shocked by a sudden impatience to have him gone, that she might get back to the Robert of her dream.

She looked more spirit than flesh by the time the almond tree was in blossom and Saxe brought her her first big roll of proofs. She had not seen him since Christmas, but she had not realized how long that was until she faced the change in him.

"You are working yourself to death," she scolded. They were sitting on a bench under the almond tree, in a sheltered corner of the

garden that held the sun. Beyond the white blossoms was a sky of burning blue, and a border of violets at their feet heaped up the lavish sweetness of the California world. "Christopher, what is the sense?"

No one could have called Christopher good looking, but he had the nicest smile in the whole world. It seemed to irradiate the creases in his lean cheeks; the tired lines about his eyes only served to spread it. "What you have been doing to yourself is what I want to know," he declared.

"Oh, I have something to show for it!"

"Well!" said Christopher, and brought out of his overcoat pocket a very new book, which he laid on her knee. Across the dark blue cover was printed, "*GOOD NEWS!*" and his name, Christopher Saxe.

"I wanted to call it *Ideals in Journalism*, but I'd hate to tell you what the publisher said to that," he explained. "And, after all, I don't want to kill the book. If a good scream across the cover will make people listen, then I'll scream. I want to be heard."

"Oh, you will be!" Sarah was thrilled and reverent before the book.

"I want the newspapers to scream, too—but

for something worth hearing," he went on. "Men are always endowing hospitals and libraries—why doesn't some millionaire endow a big daily, put the sanest men he can get in charge and turn it loose? A well edited paper with no private interests to serve, no secret motives—" He pulled himself up with a laugh. "Well, you can read all that at your leisure," he admitted.

"Oh, it's splendid to be you!" Sarah exclaimed. "I feel like—like a poodle—or a little girl in hair ribbons—beside you." Her hand caressed the fly leaf, on which was written, "Sarah, from Christopher," and the date. "I don't see why you bother with me. My father is worth your while—when he's good; but, Christopher, truly, I am not!" She looked all ready to efface herself on the instant, and wanted to argue against his smile, but he would not take her seriously.

"Your father is a brilliant scholar," he conceded, "but when it comes to sitting under an almond tree with blossoms dropping on his hair—why, Sarah, he can't touch you. And he couldn't have written *Dickery Dock* to save his neck. Why aren't you more excited over your first proofs?"

She glanced at them remotely and shook her head. "I am glad they are there, but my heart is somewhere else. I have something to tell you, Christopher, something thrilling!" She was not looking into his face, and the sudden folding of his arms across his chest told her nothing. "It is a secret. Only my mother knows it." She paused again, shy of telling even him, yet smiling over the fun of it all.

"Tell me, Sarah!"

Something in his voice made her fear that she had led him to expect too much, and she hastened to explain.

"Oh, it is only another book—but such a nice one! Far more grown up than *Dickery*. I want to call it *Queen's Mate*. Do you think people know enough about chess to get the point? I like the sound of it, don't you? It's about—Christopher, you aren't listening!"

His arms had dropped and he was looking fixedly away over the top of the hedge to the bald line of the foothills, green now against the strong blue of the sky. He did not speak or turn, but his hand, groping, found hers and held it tightly. Sarah was surprised, but whatever Christopher did was right in her sight. When



he turned back, he was smiling, a little breathless, like one who comes up from a plunge into unknown and icy depths.

"Good work!" he said cheerfully, and gave her hand a congratulatory shake before he let it go. "When may I see it?"

"One minute I am dying to show it to you," she confessed, "and the next I don't see how I ever can. You see, it's a love story."

"I thought as much;" he spoke grimly. "Well, it isn't a totally new subject to me, you know. I shan't be in the least embarrassed."

"Oh, you are so dear and understanding!" Sarah burst out. "I don't believe there is anything one can't show you. I have part of it typewritten—I did it myself."

"You?" He considered her shadowy, poetic face and the big wave of her hair, then amusedly shook his head. "Oh, no! I don't see you sitting up at a machine."

"Come to the attic and you will."

"The attic?"

"You don't suppose we could keep a typewriter where my father could hear it? If he even knew it was in the house, it would drive him crazy. We smuggled it in while he was at

the University, and we put a folded blanket and a pillow under it—oh, it has been such a lovely joke!” Sarah’s laugh was deliciously young. “Once I left the door open, and he said at dinner that he thought he had heard a woodpecker. Mother and I nearly exploded.”

Saxe did not find it altogether funny. “Aren’t you cold up there?”

“Oh, I wear a woolly bathrobe with a hood, and a rug about my feet. I don’t mind it except when my hands get stiff. I learned out of a book—the touch method. I don’t look at the keys at all. I really was terribly clever at it, Christopher.” She jumped up. “Come and see it! Come and see me do it!”

Saxe would have gone anywhere on earth when she summoned him like that, and he did not realize what a perilous expedition it was until they were embarked. Sarah left him in the hall while she flew up to consult her mother; then the latter greeted him in dumb show from the top of the stairs and signaled for a cautious ascent. Communication was limited to vivid smiles until all three were in the attic, but they made no apologies. Their behavior evidently did not seem to them unusual.

"Safe!" Sarah rejoiced.

The attic was not Mrs. Cawthorne's idea of safety. She stood just inside the door, her skirt wound tightly about her and a ready hand on the knob, while Sarah uncovered the typewriter and showed Saxe its perfections.

"Of course, you probably have seen one before," she suddenly remembered, ready to laugh at herself, but Saxe remained grave.

"You make me feel as if I had not," he said. "I have been taking mine as a matter of course, quite forgetting that it is a wonder, a little miracle. I shall go back to it with new vision."

"Play something, dear," said her mother absently, nervous eyes roving the corners.

Sarah went over to her, kissed her, and pushed her gently through the door. "You wait for us down-stairs," she said with mothering compassion.

"Well, dear—I am likely to scream any minute if I stay," Mrs. Cawthorne admitted, offering an apologetic smile to Saxe through the closing door.

Sarah came back concerned only with showing off her new accomplishment, and seated herself before the machine under the skylight. A

long slant of sunshine, crossing the brown dusk, spilled gold on the edges of her hair; when she lifted her face, closing her eyes to prove her good faith with the touch method, she might have been a young St. Cecelia playing her harpsichord. Saxe dropped down on the camphor-wood chest against the wall and watched her over folded arms. The kind little American mother who had gone down-stairs did not dream how the shadowy old cave of a place would evoke the primitive man; but, knowing, she would only have been sorry, and gone without fear. Her innocence had a wisdom above that of worldly experience.

Sarah thought she could do it a little faster when she was alone.

"I pretended I didn't know you were there, but, of course, I did," she explained, pulling out the sheet. "There are several mistakes. I have written, 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow *room*.' But, still—that isn't so bad for a beginner. Come and see it."

"So you did remember that I was here!" Saxe spoke harshly, not moving.

Sarah saw at once, with mortified clearness, that she had been rude and egotistical, using

her guest simply as an audience, and she offered earnest apology. "You are so sympathetic—I forget, and bore you. It is your own fault, Christopher. You have spoiled me," she accused him, a quiver in her voice.

"Oh, good God!" he muttered, and rose to his feet as though man could bear no more. "Sarah, don't you understand? How can you be such a blind bat?"

It was not at all like love in books: he was hostile, scolding her; and yet in a flash Sarah did understand. If he had kept alive a spark of hope, her distress would have quenched it.

"Oh, no, Christopher!"

"Why not? Oh, I know—you don't care a red cent for me. I didn't mean to speak, but there are human limits—" A sigh shook him like a sob. His voice, rough and strange to her, seemed to be tearing its way through physical barriers. "You needn't say anything. If I had found you first—you are everything in the world that I love best in a woman. . . . Oh, I could have made you care! That is the unbearable part of it, that is what kills me. . . . I have lost you by such a little!" His hands closed on hers as though he would drag

her spirit to him by main force, but at their touch all the fight went out of him, for the terrified blood had receded, leaving them deathly cold and helpless. "You poor little child," he muttered, trying to warm them between his. "I have frightened you half to death. I'm sorry, sorry. But you had to know it, sooner or later. I couldn't help it."

The sudden kindness hurt intolerably. She caught away her hands to hide her face.

"Oh, no, no!" she breathed.

He drew up a chair beside her, trying for her sake to make it seem less momentous.

"Dear Sarah, if you had not been—preoccupied, you would have seen it long ago. I won't belittle it, even to comfort you; but I can't bear it if you are going to suffer, too. Sarah, if you cry, I shall!"

She fought for composure, and he waited until she could lift her head. She was never to forget that first look that passed between them. She had not known that there was an intimacy like this, full of grave trust and unashamed sorrow.

"You wanted life," he reminded her, as though she might reproach him for disturbing



her peace. "You see, it can come in through the hedge."

Sarah still could not quite believe her senses. "You wanted to marry me, Christopher?"

"Yes."

The unadorned word had an eloquence that wrung her.

"I haven't meant to," she faltered. "I have always thought you were the nicest man in the whole world. And that was all."

"That is something. I shall carry it away with me."

"Away?"

He had evidently not meant to open that subject, for he hesitated until she repeated her frightened question:

"You are not going away?"

"Yes." He straightened up and went ahead with it. "I am going out to the Orient."

"Oh, no!"

"Why not, Sarah?"

She had no answer for that except her own unlawful despair, so she said nothing.

"I have finished here," he went on. "My book is out, I am free. They are offering me a good position on the paper, but—I am tired of the

cable cars, I'm sick of the telephone! The far East will feel quiet and different. And there is plenty of work for me to do out there. I can place a series of articles any time. Yes, I want to go."

He was miles away from her already, at home in strange lands that would never be more than names to her, meeting new experiences, loving some new girl while she stayed at home in her green cage. Sarah's heart seemed to break audibly in the sob that flung her down on her new manuscript.

"I can't bear it," she said, over and over. "I shall never get out. I can't bear it!" She had not cried so since her childhood, but she felt no shame. The protest came pouring out from behind her clasped arms. "You are the first friend I ever had—and now you are going away. My book will come out—but you won't be here—or care. You can go—wherever you like—all over the big gorgeous world—while I have to—just wait—and wait—and wait—Oh, it is not fair, Christopher, it is not fair!"

He had listened rigidly, but there was no syllable that could mean hope for him. Perhaps he guessed what that bitter, "and wait—"

meant, for he did not move or speak until she had sobbed herself quiet, and then he was only a kind friend, reasonable and little aloof.

"Your book will bring you new friends, Sarah, dozens of them. No hedge can keep them out. Of course, I shall wander back some day, and then we will have a beautiful time. I am not going to write to you—if I can help it. It is the only way. I'm sorry, but I have been through—oh, everybody knows what it is, I suppose. Now I must get back to town." He rose, then reconsidered, his eyes on her bent head. "No—suppose I read a chapter or two of the new book," he said more gently. "There won't be time to send it to me; and I can't go without knowing something about it. You are never to forget that I discovered you, Sarah Cawthorne."

She knew that he was giving her time to recover from her storm before she faced him, and his consideration nearly made her cry again. She handed him the typewritten chapters in silence, then put all her will into tranquillizing her shaken body. An hour ago, she could not have stayed in the room while he read her work; now, in their new intimacy, she loved sitting

there beside him, within reach of his hand, hearing the quiet turning of the leaves. He was reading all that she had typed. The light grew so dim that he had to hold the manuscript high up toward the skylight, but she felt his growing interest, and would not break in on it by getting a light. When at last he laid down the pages, they could scarcely see each other's faces.

"Well?" Sarah asked, as he did not speak.

"Oh, it is good, charming, far ahead of the first;" his tone was hurried, absent. "It will sell by the million. Oh, yes—you won't have any difficulty with that. Just go ahead. It is what people want."

She was puzzled, straining her eyes to read in his face what he was not saying. "Well, then—?" she repeated.

"It's all right. Just go ahead like that. Congratulations!"

"But you are not saying something," she insisted.

He flung up his long arms with a smothered shout of joy. "Sarah, you don't know the first thing about love! You know the pretty game, the flirtation, the instinctive play—you're wav-

ing a white hand from a high lattice—but, my beloved little girl, you have never touched love—you have only dreamed dreams. You are not awake!”

Sarah was mortally offended. She disliked at any time to be called “young”; but to have the deepest experience of her heart denied and derided was intolerable.

“I am sorry to contradict you, but you don’t know what you are talking about,” she said, keeping a precarious politeness.

He was exalted beyond the reach of snubs. “Oh, don’t I! You write prettily, delightfully, about ‘making’ love, but it is all from the throat up. Man’s desire and woman’s need—you don’t know any more about them than you did the night of your first party. You are not in love with that man!”

“I am!” she flung back, and then grew hot all over with shame and wrath. “You had no right to make me say that,” she accused him sternly. “I shall not forgive it. I am glad you are going away.”

“I am not going away.” His joy was dashed, but he still triumphed. “I shall stay right here.”

They faced each other like enemies.

"I won't see you. You can never come here again."

"As you say." He was angry, too. "I certainly am not coming against your will. But I will not go away till the day you marry some one else. Do you understand that?"

Her answer was caught back, and she lifted a hand in warning. Her trained senses had heard a step inaudible to him. She crossed to the door and opened it.

"Your father has gone out to walk, dear, so it is a good time to come down," her mother suggested. "Doesn't Mr. Saxe want tea?"

"No; he has to go now. He has been reading my new story," Sarah explained, glad of the dimness that veiled them.

"Oh, doesn't he think it is beautiful?" She turned eagerly to Saxe, and his assent satisfied even her.

"I have never read a story that gave me more pleasure," he said, challenging eyes on Sarah. She turned away with the rudest little shrug she could achieve.

"You have been most kind," she said with the edges of her lips.



And so he went, and Sarah tried to cover her shameful admission by hating him, and being cool to Robert. It was a sore-hearted and angry time. The lovers in her new book quarreled bitterly—but oh, how deliciously they made up!

## IX

**I**N theory, when ladies are cool, lovers are the more ardent, a retreat heightens the pursuit; but Robert's emotions had no regard for tradition. He turned cool himself, and took Dosia Warren to the theater. And though they presently made it up, he kept a faintly guarded air, as if, having failed him once, Sarah might again lapse from the perfect admiration that was her charm.

Sarah, looking on at his bodily splendor, the sunny geniality of his heart (when no one had stupidly wounded it), his growing importance in his profession, the charm that lay in the way he rolled a cigarette or threw back his head when he laughed—Sarah, seeing all these things, cried in her aching heart, "If this isn't love, then what is love?" Yet the hateful accusation stuck like a burr, it forced her to think. Heretofore she had kept Robert in a sealed niche, as some people keep their religion, protected from the action of their brains and used only for emotional purposes. Now she began to ask herself formal questions about him—

questions that could be triumphantly answered. He was a good son, a man of upright life, kindly, truthful, a hard worker—think how one could describe him in a letter! Of course she loved him. She would have loved him for his provable fine qualities even if he had lacked his bodily charm. “From the throat up”—what on earth did that mean? Her love might be love in the bud as yet, but it would burst into full flower the first time he took her into his arms and kissed her.

She felt now that she had not long to wait for that moment. Something as potent as a love philter was being prepared for her at full speed, three thousand miles away. She had said little about *Dickery Dock*, and Robert had not seemed to take in the fact of her coming authorship, so now she hid it until she could lay her gift in his hands. It was to be a moment of grave beauty. Sarah always adored the scene wherein the wife confesses to the moved and utterly unprepared husband the secret of her coming motherhood, and she foresaw the offering of *Dickery Dock* as a miniature replica of that lovely revelation. Perhaps Sarah’s father was right about her sense of hu-

mor; but surely it was better to have so reliable and loving a heart!

On the day that the ten author's copies came, Mrs. Cawthorne was in bed. She stayed in bed much more than usual this spring, but so casually, paying so little attention to where she was, that her family had not realized the change. The books, opened on the counterpane beside her, had a hundred charms; even the smell was enjoyable. And the cover was not bad at all, when you considered what awful covers some books had.

"'By Sarah Cawthorne,'" she read aloud. "I am glad I lived to see that. You funny little girl—growing up into an author!"

"It is a joke, isn't it!" Sarah admitted. "But I haven't people enough for so many copies."

"Well, there is your Aunt Sadi. And Robert—you will give him one, won't you?"

Would she! Sarah smiled to herself, with a leap of the heart. "Oh, yes," she said casually.

"And Mr. Saxe, of course."

The very name could scorch. Sarah had not yet learned to live with the memory of what she had told Christopher Saxe. It had obliterated all that had gone before that moment. Only the

speediest possible declaration from Robert could legitimize it and wipe away the shame.

"It would please Nelly tremendously if I gave her one," she said.

"Oh, yes, dear! And there is my copy, and yours—and your father's?"

"No," said Sarah, and then, hearing his step in the hall, started up to close the door; but she was too late.

He, also, had a book in his hand.

"Sarah, I have just run across this book—by your lanky friend Saxe," he said, coming in. "The man is no fool; why, I agree with almost everything he says. He's got an old subject, but he handles it with an inspired common sense. I should like to—Hello! What is all this?"

"My book;" Sarah spoke defiantly and Mrs. Cawthorne stiffened among her pillows, but he did not notice. He had picked up a copy with an amused glimmer that deepened as he turned the pages, reading a line here and there. It was very hard to bear. A passive blankness was the best that Sarah could do. Inwardly she forgot to go on breathing until he closed the book, holding it off at arm's length.



"The cover suggests a valentine—a valentine designed by a German pastry cook," he observed. "Well, I suppose you will get some fun out of it now, and later you can live it down. Rather a pity to have used your own name."

Mrs. Cawthorne's face had flamed. "Sarah's book will do more good in the world than all your dry old writings put together!" she burst out.

He looked in surprise from the red mother to the pale daughter. "Have I trodden on the susceptibilities of the young author? Well, it will do you good, Sairy. Prepare you a little for what is coming. Wait till the reviewers get after you!" And he limped away with an internal chuckle.

"Oh, he is the worst!" Mrs. Cawthorne exclaimed. "Don't mind him, darling."

Sarah pressed the thought of Robert to her heart. "Oh, I don't mind anything," she said.

All day she watched for Robert, and all the next day, not daring even to go to the attic lest Nelly should inadvertently say she was out. The following day she almost forgot him, for the mail brought an intimation of the coming miracle—the second great adventure of her life.



"So that is what you have been doing inside your hedge," Dosia wrote. "I saw your name in the papers yesterday, in letters a foot high. I have not read the book yet, but I am looking forward to it. Meanwhile, won't you take luncheon with me very informally next Friday at half past one? Several of your old friends—" and so on.

Sarah accepted the advance as an unalloyed and most touching kindness, and flew over to the city to pick up what she could in the way of personal adornment. There was no time to have anything made, but she was not a person whose clothes mattered very much. Her bodily grace dominated them. When she came back through the hedge, hurrying as always lest something had happened to her mother, Robert was leaving the house, and she had time for a long look at him before he was aware of her.

Robert was low in his mind. His hands sagged in his pockets, his foot kicked at the gravel. Even the sight of her did not cheer him.

"Oh, Sarah!" he said unsmilingly. "You weren't in, so I sat a while with your mother." He seemed to be accusing her of something.

"Oh, then she told you about my book!" Sarah was dreadfully disappointed. "I meant to surprise you with it."

"I saw it announced in the papers." His frown deepened. "Sarah, do you have to put up with that sort of thing?"

"What thing?"

"The abominable publicity. Having your name displayed like a breakfast food. I can't tell you what a shock it gave me. You surely don't like it!"

Her native truthfulness had never come harder. "I am afraid I do," she said miserably. "I have been so cooped up—it is like having a part of me get out, don't you see?"

Robert was not to be appeased. "I suppose I am old-fashioned," he said stiffly, "but there is something sacred to me about a girl's name. If girls only understood how men feel about that sort of thing, they wouldn't be in such a hurry to rush into print, I can tell you."

With any one else, Sarah would have argued that; but she hated to prove Robert in the wrong. When her case was too good, she changed the subject.

"They won't advertise much," she reassured him. "It is such a harmless little book—nothing that any one need mind. I have a copy for you. Won't you come in and get it?"

He came with a poor grace. Even the "Robert from Sarah" on the title page did not touch him. The book's presence between them seemed to make him uneasy; he was not like himself until it had been thrust into a pocket.

"I shall begin to write in about fifteen years," he said then, with a clearing brow. "My books won't be novels, though."

"Of course not!" Her warm voice admitted the inferiority of novels, and after that they had a very nice time; but it was cruelly unlike the scene that Sarah had awaited.

"Love isn't very satisfactory except when you are all by yourself," she admitted sadly after her young lord had gone.

Girls to whom a luncheon is a matter of course or even a bore could not understand how Sarah lay burning awake the night before, how she rode out into the morning on a charger with a streaming tail, how her heart failed her and she longed to get out of it, how she agonized lest boats and cars be delayed, and so had to

walk the neighborhood for an agitating half-hour because she was too early—and then managed to be ten racking minutes late. The drawing room was a blur of faces and voices, and Sarah, clutched by an insane fear that she might not know Dosia when she saw her, crossed the sill with the same grave, pale composure that she would have shown on the steps of the scaffold. And then the miracle began.

“Well, Sarah!” “Well, Sarah *Cawthorne*!” “Sarah, I read it last night and it is perfectly sweet!” Three old acquaintances had magically become three old friends. Their ancient indifference had given them glamour for the little Sarah; she found their present enthusiasm dazzling. And it made the strangers look at her with interest, so that when Dosia put in a dry, “Dear me, Sarah, how does it feel to be an author?”—the true answer would have been, “Like heaven!”

“But it is such a very little book,” she warned them earnestly.

They laughed as though she had said something witty, or wicked. Then Dosia put an arm through hers and led her to the place of honor. All during that enchanted luncheon the talk

kept its face to her. She did not say much—she did not have to; they had an air of taking her value for granted while they proved their own; and, so protected, she found the hedge rolling back like a heavy mist, leaving her in brilliant sunshine. She made no distinctions among the guests: they were people—at last, people! When they asked her to come to luncheon or to tea, she accepted everything. And Dosia looked on with a small wise smile under the eyelashes that were no longer too pale for beauty.

“Sarah can’t trail over to the city every other day,” she interposed. “But she is coming to spend a week with me before long, and you can all ask her then.”

“Oh, Dosia!” Sarah was overwhelmed.

“Of course, it is one for you, Sarah, and two for me—they will have to invite me as well,” Dosia explained, and something in her cool competent voice brought a momentary chill, a consciousness of forces not understood and perhaps not benign. For the moment, it was a relief to say that she could not leave her mother.

“Bring her, too,” said Dosia. “She shall have a sunny room and be just as quiet as she likes.

Mother will write and ask her. I always liked your mother. She has great charm."

The glow returned. "It is too good to be true," said Sarah, "but I love your thinking of it."

Dosia turned and looked at her with amused scrutiny. "I am going to make a lion of you," she said, dropping her voice.

"Why, Dosey?" The impulsive question had an ungracious echo in her own ears, and she would have caught it back; but Dosia never denied that she had her reasons.

"Well, you count now—for one thing: you will shed a luster on me," she said, resting her chin on clasped hands, white and jeweled. "'To meet Miss Sarah Cawthorne'—that will be quite an asset if they go on advertising you at this rate."

She had spoken only for Sarah, and Sarah recognized with a thrill of gratification that this candor would never be for the others. Dosia could trust her with it, as she had trusted her the day they met in the square. Her compact and efficient brain recognized a brain worthy to receive her discoveries. The swirl of her red gold hair, perfectly arranged, her charming



clothes and her air of maturity, made her a figure of importance among these other girls. She did not need to talk to them, and she seemed to know it, merely keeping them going with an occasional adroit touch. Sarah put by what she had said, to be mastered later.

“‘For one thing,’” she repeated. “Then there is another thing?”

Dosia laughed a little. “You are much too clever,” she observed, turning back to her other guests.

The invitation came the next day, and for an exalted half-hour Mrs. Cawthorne thought that she could do it. Then she gave it up, sinking back relievedly among her pillows.

“Oh, Bunny, I can’t; but I don’t want to hear any nonsense about not leaving me,” she declared, her spirit still erect and laughing. “You are too good—that is your one fault. I won’t have such a model daughter.”

“But I want you to go, mother!”

“Oh, I don’t—I can’t. You go, and I will get in Janet McGowan.”

Sarah was troubled. “But she won’t know the things you mind the way I know them.”

“I will tell her without shame.”

"But, dearest, having a trained nurse will make you think you are ill."

"Nonsense! Janet's massage will be good for me, and her gossip even better. I shall know more about what is going on than you will at the end of the week, I can assure you. Sit down there and write that you will come, and at the same time write to Janet. Mind your mother without arguing."

Sarah rose and put on the garden hat that she had thrown off when she ran up-stairs with the letter.

"I shall telephone and find out if Janet McGowan will be free before I write one word," she announced.

"I should hate to be as unselfish as you are," was her mother's comment; but the eyes that followed her were adoring.

Janet could come; clothes were commanded; for two hours every day, when her mother supposed she was writing on her book, Sarah was in a studio a mile away, taking dancing lessons. Writing? That power had gone out as though it had never existed. She looked at her manuscript remotely, with a vague distaste, and finally tumbled it into the camphor-wood chest

and closed the lid on it. She was living in the week ahead as she had once lived in the coming party, and her mother never tired of the topic, but Robert met it at first with reserve, then with definite objection.

"I like Dosia—I admire her," he conceded; "but a man of the world knows how to discount a lot that she says. The hedge has kept you like something precious, Sarah. I'd hate to have you change." It was spoken almost like a lover, and Sarah's heart ran to meet his. They were sitting in the sun on the front steps, and the spring radiance was on the old garden.

"I shan't change, Robert. At least, I shan't throw away anything that you like," she promised gravely. That left him a perfect answer—"So you care what I like, Sarah!" She had always a lighting vision of what he might say, side by side with the disappointing actuality.

"You can't tell what you will do with a lot of people flattering you and making a fuss over you," he said, frowning. "I have had three cards with, 'To meet Miss Sarah Cawthorne' on them." He uttered that like an accusation, and Sarah, for the first time in their history, was moved to make gentle fun of him.

"I advise you to accept," she said. "She is a rising young author, well worth meeting."

"A busy physician has little time for social life," was the stiff answer.

"But the busy physician has read the book, hasn't he?" She had tried to say that on several previous visits, but had never been able to get it out. Now it came of itself, naturally, without visible tremor.

It was Robert who was embarrassed. "Oh, yes—yes. I meant to—to speak of it." He was strangely constrained. "I thought it—very sweet, very nice. I don't set up to be a judge of novels—but—but—a very nice little story, I'm sure. I don't suppose I read a novel once in ten months. There is always a pile of medical journals—" He edged off from the subject with evident relief, and Sarah in her kindly politeness helped him to escape it altogether. She did not understand, yet she dimly recognized that if he had not liked the book, he could have told her so at perfect ease; it was having to praise that so disturbed him.

"I can't read or do anything sensible with Dosia ahead of me," she confessed. "Robert, you will come to the big tea on the eighteenth,

won't you? People don't fall ill on Sunday. It is to be at the Klondike Warrens'. Aren't they good, when they don't know me at all? I want you to come to that."

"I can come for a little while, I suppose," he conceded. "But don't count on me for any dances. I hate dancing."

"The girls' hair always gets in your mouth," she finished it for him, with a rush of laughter. But he had forgotten, and looked an amazed question.

"I could go to a dance every other night if I cared to waste my time that way," he held forth. "I don't see why they keep on asking me, but they do. I suppose because, when I do go, I brace up and play the game. But when I get home, I'm pretty apt to say, 'What's the use?' "

"Pleasure is worth while, Robert!"

"If it is pleasure. I find the average girl very tiresome. She can't talk of anything but herself. You are too good for that crowd, Sarah!"

"Well, is there a better crowd that I could get?"

"I don't see what you want of a crowd. We are having a pretty nice time, aren't we?"

"Here?"

"Yes—you and I—here."

It was coming. Now, this minute, with no more preliminary than that. His eyes said it, his hand, taking hers from her knee, repeated it. She had only to admit that it was good enough, staying here with him, and the glory of love would descend upon them. He held it off, consciously, awaiting her decision. No words were needed; the air rang with his silent demand. All the traditions of love and the world well lost gave her only one answer; and, because her honest heart could not make it, she burst out with a reproach:

"You ought to want me to go, Robert! I have been so shut in—you ought to be glad that I can get out!"

One did not lightly reprove Robert. The penalty was immediate and severe. Love withdrew, and he released her hand.

"I hope you will have a very nice time," he said formally, rising. His eyes were those of a stranger. "Remember me to Miss Warren, will you? Now I must run." He lifted his hat and turned away.

"Robert!" It was more than a reproach—it was a stern and righteous rebuke.



"I beg your pardon?"

Sarah was shocked to the foundations. This was the first trouble with Robert for which she could not take the entire blame, and it hurt dreadfully. "You are behaving very badly," she told him.

Robert, his nose well lifted, was inspecting the sky-line. "I am sorry," he said with extreme courtesy, and then, as Mrs. Cawthorne opened the front door, he went without a relenting glance.

Perhaps Mrs. Cawthorne read his retreating back. She sat down on the step beside her daughter, and her "Well, dear?" opened the way to any communication one cared to make.

Sarah was glowering over her doubled fists. "Oh, mother, I do think men are unsatisfactory!"

"Absolutely," was the cheerful answer. "But they are the only thing we have got in that line." Her eyes fell on a small gray man, limping up the drive. "We might as well make the best of them."

"But they could so easily be everything we want," Sarah exclaimed. "Some of them must be. The lovers in books can't be all lies."

"If ladies wrote them, they are," Mrs. Cawthorne began, then caught herself up. "Write them as they should be, darling, as women want them. Maybe they will learn," she said hopefully.

Mr. Cawthorne was too near for any more on that topic. They waited for him, Mrs. Cawthorne making room on the step in case he wanted to join them. She never got over the longing to present a family effect. He halted in front of them, leaning on his stick, wicked eyes on his daughter.

"What have you been doing to my dear friend R-R-Robert?" He loved to stammer over that name. "If he had had a horse out there, he would have kicked it. As it was only a poor dumb car, he couldn't do anything but jam its levers."

Mrs. Cawthorne always stood up for Robert; but lately her defense had lost its enthusiasm, and she had often a troubled and incredulous eye for her daughter.

"Oh, Robert would not hurt any living thing," she said absently.

"Unless it was a l-l-lady," he suggested. "What I like especially about that young man

is that he has the courage of his feelings. If he is disturbed in his mind, he will never deceive you with a false blitheness. I'm that way, too. It's a bond between us. We don't pretend."

"You certainly don't," agreed his wife with a faint sigh. "Perhaps that is why we do. Perhaps some one has to, dear!"

Mr. Cawthorne mounted the steps to go in. "I hate being called 'dear,'" he observed genially.

"I know you do, Stephen!" She spoke with quick apology. Sarah had turned on him a blaze of silent anger, but Mrs. Cawthorne was wholly without resentment. "It is a stupid old habit. I don't really mean it, you know!"

He smiled at that, and she actually laughed. She was still amused after the door had closed on him. Sarah could not bear it.

"That was the most brutal thing I ever heard a man say," she burst out, striking the step with clenched fists. "He ought to be killed for it, mother!"

Mrs. Cawthorne looked on at her wrath with loving compassion. "I think, darling, a good many men are like your father, underneath,"

she said mildly; "only their wives don't let them say it, or even recognize it to themselves. Men are not created like women, you know. But, of course, a really able and clever woman makes them think they are. That is civilization, dear. Now do you want to come and get some roses? The Gloire de Dijon is out."

"Oh, I don't understand life, I don't understand anything," Sarah muttered, and went for the scissors.

Since no human experience is permitted to be perfect, Sarah had to carry a heartache with her to the city; but it must be admitted that she frequently forgot it. *Dickery Dock* and its new California author seemed to be blazoned on everything that could carry print, and Dosia fulfilled the promise to make a lion of her with a skill and lavishness that caused Sarah to cry more than once, "Why, Dosey? Why?"

"For you don't need me," she argued, using Dosia's language. They were up-stairs in dressing-gowns, lounging over a cup of tea—girls together, just as Sarah had dreamed it all these years. "And you don't want me to love you. I could, but it would bore you frightfully. You know everybody, go every-

where—what can a mild little lionette like me do for you?"

"I am having a good time out of it—for one thing," Dosia maintained.

"But you never say what the other thing is," said Sarah, and they laughed.

"Now you want to know who is coming to-night," Dosia said, as though they had no more time to waste on generalities. She treated the visit like a campaign and did nothing without a reason. "There will be only six of us—father and mother are going over to Aunt Clara. I thought that would be better. George Moore is for you. He adores poetry and his father is Moore and Conklin. He would be a very good person for you." Sarah's startled laugh showed her ready to take that humorously, but Dosia was entirely serious. "You will get on with him—he has a great deal of sentiment. He can't endure me. The Tommy Harveys have never read a book through in their lives, but they have two stunning houses—they are good people for you to know. And then Mr. Hurd for me. He is a big, burly, common old thing, but he gives me tips on the stock market."

"Stock market, Dosey!"

"Rather. I doubled my allowance last year." Dosia put down her teacup and dropped back on the couch, stretching a satin slipper to the fire. Chiffon sleeves fell back from the childishly soft arms she clasped behind her red-gold head. Everything about her, from the lace that crossed her breast to the rather conventional luxury of her surroundings, made her thrillingly a fine lady in Sarah's eyes; and yet—"I ought to have been a man," she said impatiently. "I could run things!"

"But you do," Sarah argued. "You run everything and everybody, including your family and the stranger that is within your gates. What more do you want?"

"Oh, power, I suppose—for one thing."

The phrase made them laugh again.

"And not—love?" Sarah's voice dropped reverently over the word. She was suddenly homesick for Robert.

Dosia's eyes narrowed to two brown slits. "Oh, yes, love," she said in businesslike assent. "We don't all take it like melted moonlight, but the curse is on us. That is why I wish I were a man."

"But men love!"



"Yes—and take—and go their ways. Our rôle is so abominably indirect and slow. The feminine attitude—modest waiting—does exasperate me so."

"But would men like it, Dosey, if we made the advances?"

"No. But why is what they like more important than what I like?" Dosia kicked an impatient slipper at the laws of life. "Oh, I would cut out the whole thing if I could. But a woman never amounts to anything until she marries and gets it off her mind. Then she is free to go ahead, she can become somebody." Dosia rose. "Now, my young lion, we must dress. Ring for Suzanne when you want help."

"Oh, but I want to talk," Sarah pleaded; "about love and men and power and all the things we don't agree on. You shock me to death, you know—only you are so interesting, I have to put off the shock until I understand better."

"I wouldn't understand too well," advised Dosia, turning on the lights above the dressing table. "You are undoubtedly a great deal better person than I—in the sight of Heaven. I warn you, I am not a fine character."

"I don't believe it," said Sarah stoutly. "Look what you have done for me."

Dosia gave her an odd glance in the mirror. "Well, I have got George Moore for you," she said, as though answering herself. "Now run along. I will share with you the secrets of my soul, but not of my toilet."

"Well, send word when I may come back;" and Sarah dragged herself away. She did not need an hour to dress, and could not conceive how one extended it over so simple a process. If nature had not been very good to Sarah, giving her bodily grace and hair that waved naturally into place, her excellent clothes would have availed her little, for she seldom knew what she was doing when she put them on. She did not dream over here as she did at home—that power had gone out as though it had never existed; but she had so much to think about that she had scarcely time to feel. Her quarrel with Robert was a grievous wound—and yet George Moore did sound interesting!

"I wonder if I am shallow?" she asked herself, then gave it up and could not help being happy. People—every day, people!

Dosia would have made a brilliant press

agent. Every newspaper reader in the city presently knew that Sarah was there, and who was entertaining her. Sarah flatly refused to be interviewed, but Dosia talked to the reporters, and even managed to present one without explaining him. (It was he who described Sarah's face as perpetually "lit by sunlight coming through live oaks.") The book shops telegraphed their reorders for *Dickery Dock*, and by Sunday it was a matter of social importance to be invited to the Warrens' reception.

"Talk of Cinderella!" Sarah spoke solemnly as the motor took them up the hills Sunday afternoon. "All I asked was to get out through the hedge. I never dreamed of asking to be famous."

"Well, don't you like it?" Dosia asked.

Sarah thought that over. "The fuss over my book makes me a little ashamed," she confessed. "My father says it is trash, and all the time I am perfectly sure that they think so, too. I imagine fame is something that happens to other people, don't you? It would never be quite true, for one's self. But it does make them want to know me, and I adore that. Oh, friends, Dosey!"

"You are a queer child." Dosia was looking on at her earnestness with good-humored amusement. "I can't decide whether you are a little girl of forty or a mature woman of twelve. You are all theory as yet. You live entirely in your head."

There it was again—*from the throat up*. Sarah flushed resentfully.

"That is all you know about it," she said.

"Oh, I dare say you have had tremendous affairs — alone by yourself," Dosia conceded. "But I don't believe you know what can happen, Sarah Cawthorne!"

Sarah had a rueful thought that with Robert nothing really did happen. Then the forbidden memory of Saxe in the dusky attic leaped into her mind and stayed there, in spite of her shamed recoil. She had slammed the door shut on the experience before its significance had been revealed to her; now, going back over the scene, she began to discern some big secret that she had not known at the time. Something more than romance and affection had hovered over her like a shadowy presence, something grimly unadorned, as real as thirst, or death. Whenever she went back to the attic, the pres-

ence would be there, waiting for her. The knowledge had no words, but it shook her bodily. A blaze of excitement followed, but she did not want to talk any more about affairs, and what could happen.

"It is too wonderful," she cried, turning away from the window. "I don't mean the bay and these glorious, loping old streets, up and down—I mean the houses, with some one I know or am going to know every few blocks, and some one to bow to every time we go downtown. People, Dosey! Dozens, streets full of men and women, and one hundred and fifty of them coming this afternoon to make friends! I have got three friends started—for George Moore does like me, and Constance Whitney, and Isabel Olmstead. I tell you, they like me! The hedge is down!" Then, as they pulled up before marble pillars, shyness suddenly clutched her. "Please stay near me," she begged as they went in.

The most sophisticated good taste that money could buy had beautified the Klondike Warrens' palace, and the two simple, hearty, incongruous figures lived complacently among their treasures, remembering with some trouble what was

what, and as undisturbed by their footmen or their fine guests as they had been by the miners that had swarmed the boarding-house of their dark ages. They showed Sarah the massed flowers in the drawing-rooms and the feast in the dining-room as simply as though she were a patron who had given an order, and whom they hoped they had pleased. Their unconsciousness of how very good it was of them troubled her courteous soul. She tried to tell them, but the shyness was growing worse every moment, and her speech was stiffening into conventional phrases. Before she could fight it down, other girls arrived to help receive, and the company was coming in through the hedge.

It was very strange—it was unspeakably disheartening. The history of the first party seemed to be repeating itself. The little dinners and theater parties of the past week had been made easy: seated between friendly souls, turned toward her, Sarah had been lured out so pleasantly that the process seemed as natural as blooming to a flower. Now she was confronting a new test—the real test, and the kindly preparation went for nothing. She could not do it. The guests were charming to her, but



she could not talk to them at a moment's notice as they talked to one another, and so they passed on to their own friends, leaving her alone in the center of the party. Klondike millions had made an imposing setting, and the easy, richly dressed guests accepted themselves as what the newspapers call society, but Sarah was unawed by externals; a country gathering in a hospitable kitchen would have seemed to her as hopelessly inaccessible. The hedge had lasted too long. She could never carry freedom with the ease of those who had grown up in it. She was a failure, a stick.

And then, head and shoulders above the crowd—just as he had come years ago—came Robert. Sarah saw him from the other end of the great room, and her day was saved. *From the throat up, indeed*—when her heart was leaping like a dervish in her side! He was a long time in making his way to her, for, of course, every one stopped him, and she did not once look toward him, but her eyes shone, her laugh came easily, she could talk now—because it mattered so little what happened, with Robert coming. And so people lingered

and a group formed, and suddenly she was in the very heart of the party—she, Sarah.

Dosia stood quietly at one side, and now Robert was talking with her, not ten feet away. Sarah could wait. It was good that he should see how brave and gay she was with girls and men, that he should be a little proud of her even as she was proud of him. She piled it high for him before she turned to get her reward.

Neither Dosia nor Robert was there. Sarah had been feeling his presence like a living current, yet he was nowhere in sight. As soon as she could break away, she moved through the rooms, looking for him. She had to find him. She could have run shrieking his name. The great romance of her life seemed to be slipping through her fingers; she could not bear it.

Robert was not in the drawing-rooms or the dining-room; then she saw Dosia coming from the direction of the front door. Their eyes met, but Dosia's seemed to deny the encounter. She was busy receiving good nights when Sarah reached her side.

"Oh, Sarah, I was looking for you," she said

at once. "Good night, Mrs Perry. You were dear to come. Sarah, Robert Russell was here, but he could not get at you, you were so surrounded. Oh, good night, Frank. He left his regards for you; he had to run off. Good night, Miriam. Yes, Sarah is leaving me to-morrow—isn't it hateful of her? You know Miss Clarke, Sarah."

The long years of hiding her tumultuous emotions had armored Sarah for such moments. No one could have suspected the fainting sickness behind her graceful composure. Dosia was not waiting for an answer; she had not even looked at Sarah. The good nights kept them occupied until only the family was left. They were to dine there informally.

"Well, Miss Sarah, how does it feel to be famous?" Mr. Klondike Warren was looking down on her with large kindly approval.

Her lips said, of course, that it felt perfectly wonderful. She could not tell him that no earthly glory mattered, since Robert Russell had not come and spoken to her.

With a good night's sleep, Sarah might have been able to resurrect the glory. Years later, she would drag out the old experience and make



Suddenly she was in the very heart of the party.



it a shining wonder for her children, a tale of a little book that had slipped like a carrier pigeon through the hedge, and brought a cityful of people to greet her; for her imagination was a lavish vine and would beautify all the road behind her, and run forward to blossom up the very pillars of death. But her dream-power was to be given no chance that night, though they left early.

"Sarah must have one good long sleep, or her mother will never let her come again," Dosia explained when the car called for them at nine o'clock. She had not spoken directly to Sarah all the evening, and in the motor she talked with her mother and father while the guest leaned back in her corner. Her "Good night!" and, "Sleep well!" were publicly said, in the hall, and Sarah, having expressed what a polite and appreciative guest should feel, shut herself in to make what she could of the day's failure.

No warm rush of poetry came to her aid now. She did not want healing comfort; her young soul stood erect and cried for understanding. Bed and the dark could not help her. When the night was half gone, she threw



a dressing-gown about her and went to Dosia's room.

Dosia had not gone to bed. She sat at a table drawn up before her fire, luxuriously wrapped and surrounded, but with a pile of typewritten and printed papers before her, reducing them to a report. She made Sarah politely welcome, but Sarah had gone past the need of phrases.

"Dosia, I want to understand," she said, coming to look into the fire as though it could help. "I have got to understand. Suppose a man loves you—loves you quite unmistakably. It is in his eyes, his hands, he almost says it. Then can he get over it, all in a minute? Can he love you one day and not love you the next?"

Dosia carefully dried her pen before laying it down. "I should say that was his long suit," she observed.

Sarah shook her head as though to forbid flippant words.

"You say things like that—but I am in earnest. I have got to know. Is it true?"

"Yes. It is the first thing you learn. You are so amazed that nothing—from a man—ever surprises you again." Dosia put aside the table

and met the issue squarely. "Robert Russell could not love any one who took the center," she said. Sarah started, then stood very still, lest she check what was coming. Robert had never been discussed between them. "He can't forgive it. That is why he doesn't go out more—he can't be sure of being always in the center. He probably loved you while you were inside your hedge, but when you wrote a book and came out, you ended it. He won't forgive you."

Sarah was too astonished for pain. "But that is too unworthy," she exclaimed. "That is vanity, egotism—it isn't generous. If it is true, I could not love him."

The indictment only made Dosia smile. "You don't love Robert," she said.

The fiery "I do!" sprang to Sarah's lips, but faltered there. She had come to learn, not to fight. "Why don't I?" she asked instead.

"You are only charmed by him. You would give him up for the first serious flaw you found in his character."

"Mustn't one love—worthily?"

Dosia shrugged. "I don't live on that high plane. To me it is enough that—" She stopped, but not in time.

"Then you love him, Dosia?" They faced each other stripped of pretenses.

"I suppose it is that. I want to marry him."

"You can say these terrible things of him, and still want to marry him?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand!"

"There are things you will never understand, Sarah. They are all rather ugly, perhaps; I wouldn't try. I can give you reasons, if you want them. He is successful; presentable—one can be proud of him on the street; he won't give me very much trouble—I know exactly how to keep him contented; I want the married position. He will do very well. *Voilà!*"

"Is that all?"

Their eyes met with a shock of understanding.

"No," said Dosia shortly.

Sarah turned back to the fire, and presently made a fresh discovery there.

"So that was the other thing," she exclaimed. "That was why you invited me, Dosia—why you wanted to make a lion of me. You knew Robert, and so you did that?"

There was no bitterness in the question, no

reproach—only the passionate desire to have it all clear; but Dosia flushed.

“I only hastened matters,” she insisted. “Robert had begun to suspect your brains, and he was uneasy. He tells me things, you know—more than he means to. And he can’t forgive brains in a woman.”

“But you have brains—more than I!”

It was hopeless to make her understand. “Oh, child, what if I have? I can drop them when I please. Intellect doesn’t matter to me as it does to you; I don’t have to express my thoughts. I shall get him if I can. Very possibly I can’t. What are you going to do?”

For the first time Sarah winced. “Oh, don’t!” she breathed, as though something a little too dreadful had been said.

“Well, you wanted the truth,” Dosia reminded her.

Tears rushed to Sarah’s eyes. “It is so ugly!” she cried, and went blindly away.

Dosia rose, as though to follow, but, after a thoughtful moment, she dropped back again. Presently she drew up the table and went on with her report.

## X

ANY change could kindle Mrs. Cawthorne's animation. Even having Sarah go and a nurse take her place was momentarily stimulating, and she waved Sarah off so gaily that the girl could, for once, drop her sense of responsibility. For two days the elation supplied a fictitious strength. Mrs. Cawthorne and Janet McGowan took an excursion on the cars, they shopped, they "almost made candy," as Mrs. Cawthorne wrote Sarah. Then the stimulus suddenly failed and the worn body went down, down, till it seemed ready to drop apart with weakness. Janet, hiding grave concern under Nova Scotian briskness, would have sent for the doctor, but Mrs. Cawthorne forbade that.

"I am only resting," she explained. "I keep up so for Sarah—it is good to have a really flat rest. You do what you are told, Janet McGowan. And, for heaven's sake, don't make me keep up for you!"

She knew herself that something was seriously wrong, but she feared that if she called in

either Doctor Russell or his son the news might get to Sarah, and she would not risk that.

"She would come home by the next boat—the darling!" she thought it out and waited in loving patience for the week to wear itself away. The days grew very long, the nights were haunted and uneasy. Janet had Sarah's room and would come at a touch on the wall, but there was nothing tangible to excuse disturbing her. Janet did all that an outsider could—but Sarah was inside, she knew without telling. The longing for her rose to her mother's lips like a cry, day and night, but she kept it crushed back.

"You are worse than the hedge," she scolded herself, one restless night; "or you would be if I would let you." Then her own words came back to her like a blighting discovery. She lay very still in the dark to face it. If Sarah found out what this week had been, she would never leave her mother again. The hedge was a paltry barrier compared to the wall that would be sealed by her need and Sarah's love. And she had judged Sarah's father for the hedge.

"But I can hide," she argued eagerly. "I will say, 'Oh, hello, Sarah! Why did you come



back so soon? Janet and I are having a lovely time!" "She tried that over and over, but could not make it sound convincing. "You have got to," she told herself stoutly. "You must be off-hand and casual as well as up and dressed. She is to go every blessed chance she gets—you remember that, Lisa Cawthorne. A bad old man in the family is quite enough; we are not going to have a bad old woman, too. It can be done. If you give her one glimpse of how glad you are, I'll kill you!" Her arms went out, her face quivered into tears. "Oh, I won't swallow up your youth, my little Sarah," she wept. "You would give it to me, whole; but I am just good enough not to take it." The breeze from the open window rustled a paper in the waste basket, and she started up with a cry; but by the time Janet McGowan had answered, she was laughing.

"That old waste basket is always playing jokes on me," she explained. "Yes, move it, but go back to sleep as fast as you can. I am all right."

Only Sarah could have known how shaken she was, and Janet returned peacefully to bed. When she had had time to fall asleep, Mrs.

Cawthorne stole to her medicine cabinet and took down a box innocently labeled Bicarbonate of Soda.

"It can't be any worse for me than lying awake and screaming," she argued as the first dizzying wave of oblivion floated her off.

The week was easier after that, her duty was so clear. By Sunday she was even practising her attitude on her family.

"I believe Sarah is coming home to-morrow," she said casually to Mr. Cawthorne when he came out into the garden where she was sitting. It was a wonderful spring for roses: they massed their glowing faces against every available wall, they sprayed up in fountains from every round bed, and waved from trellises, and thrust in their heads at open windows, till it seemed as though they had taken possession of the world. Janet McGowan was cutting them for the house, frequently bringing some irresistible beauty to lay on Mrs. Cawthorne's knees. "At least, I think she is coming Monday," she amended.

Perhaps she hoped that Mr. Cawthorne might show a little of the joy that she was forced to hide, but, of course, he did nothing of the kind.

The communication did not even reach his attention. He stood before her savoring some coming wickedness until she went to meet it with a patient—

“Well?”

He produced a newspaper clipping. “I’m keeping this for Sairy,” he observed, laying it on her roses.

It was headed “Joy-writing.” Mrs. Cawthorne needed only the opening sentence, “Another happy little stranger is in our literary midst,” and her husband’s expression.

“Some penny-a-liner who couldn’t publish his own books to save his neck,” she said hotly, crumpling the slip in her hand. “Sarah shan’t see it; she gets all the snubbing she needs from her father. This is what I am saving for her.” And she brought out another clipping, headed enthusiastically, “A fresh note in fiction—*Dickery Dock* full of charm—Young California author—”

Her wrath and the clipping amused him equally.

“You used to be a pretty fair judge of literature before your daughter took her pen in hand,” he said. “Curious, how motherhood can

sap the intelligence. George Washington was right—we should keep clear of entangling alliances. Only it wasn't Washington—I believe it was Jefferson." He took a tea rose from her knee and put it in his buttonhole. "I have never seen the garden look better," he added.

They talked about the roses, idly, without much interest. Mrs. Cawthorne had been luxuriating in them before he came. It was strange, how he could blight her world. After he had limped complacently back to his study, the sunshine was chilled, the spring rapture had become a mere matter of plants. Even Sarah's coming was no longer a song in her heart. What sea-creature was it that could turn the water in its vicinity black?

"Haven't I stayed up long enough?" she begged of the nurse.

Janet lured her into a stroll, and presently the sun was back in the heavens and Sarah coming in the morning. That evening an important summons was delivered to Janet, and Mrs. Cawthorne insisted that she obey it. The poor lady had had a moment of dire panic at sight of the telegram, and relief left her buoyant.

"That is a big opportunity, Janet—far bigger than guarding me from the perils of the night," she declared. "I shall sleep like a log—my Sarah is nearly here. And kind Nelly will sleep in the next room, and do everything I want. Now go along with you. There is nothing the matter with me."

She looked so gay and secure, tucked up in her big bed, a reading light at her elbow, and kind Nelly ready to serve in any capacity, that Janet finally went.

"I don't feel just right about it," she confessed to Mr. Cawthorne, meeting him as she went out.

"Oh, I will guard her," he drawled. Later, he stopped at his wife's door to make the same offer.

"If Nelly can't keep off the bogies single-handed, you may come to me," he said. "Or I will sleep across your threshold if you prefer."

Lights were lit, people were about. The face she turned to him was vivid, laughing.

"Oh, I would rather have the bogies. But you might come and say good night, for luck."

He came and passively allowed her to draw him down and kiss him.

"A strange custom," he observed. "Utterly unknown in some countries."

She held him for a moment, searching his eyes, then dismissed him with a light push.

"Oh—you!" she murmured.

His door closed, the house grew dark. Soon it was clearly evident that Nelly was asleep in the next room. The uncouth sound droned on, hour after hour—undoubtedly disturbing Mr. Cawthorne. Whenever Mrs. Cawthorne began to doze, it dragged her back; it sawed its way through any covering. Knocking on the wall discouraged it only for a moment. At last she rose and sent the performer back to her own distant room. Nelly wanted to sit up, but Mrs. Cawthorne's dread of her husband's exasperation had wiped out every other fear.

"All I want is quiet," she declared. "Go just as fast as you can!" And Nelly went.

She slept, after that, for several hours, but the night was still dark when she suddenly awoke, starting up as though she had been called.

"What is it?" she said aloud.

There was no answer, nothing stirred, and yet the stillness of the house felt like suspended



action rather than emptiness. The night seemed to be holding its breath before some coming sound. She listened right and left, every nerve taut, for the first clue, the breath that should release the approaching terror and give it at least a name. She could feel it swelling about her, rising to its full height—and then there was a sound, a small, definite, living sound somewhere in the house. It struck her drawn nerves like a blow on dynamite.

She was unconscious that she screamed. She knew only that her husband had said she might come to him. She ran wildly through the dark, lost to direction, lost to everything, until even the floor beneath her feet failed her, and she went crashing into space. She would have fallen the length of the stairs but for Nelly, who had come creeping up, a step at a time, to be sure that all was well.

\* \* \* \* \*

Morning was in the room when Mrs. Cawthorne's eyes opened. Before they held any memory, they met the sunlight with a look of relief. Then they passed slowly from Doctor Russell and the strange nurse to Nelly, hastily dressed and red-eyed, at the foot of the bed,

and, beyond them all, sunk in a chair, a little gray man whose head rested on his hand. A voice said, "She is coming to," and there was a stir about her, something was given her in a glass.

"Why are they all here?" she wondered, and recognized uneasily that she must be giving a great deal of trouble. Surely Nelly wanted to be at her day's work. Then she remembered.

"Oh, dear—did I scream?" she apologized.

They said vaguely soothing things, but she knew that she must have screamed, and that Mr. Cawthorne had been seriously disturbed. She tried to say something humorous and sorry to him, but he was so far off, and he would not look toward her, so she gave it up with a sigh. Presently it occurred to her that even now, when she was all right again, they did not go away. Doctor Russell must want his breakfast. She looked up at him in surprise.

"Oh—am I badly hurt?" she asked.

"You don't seem to be hurt at all," was the comfortable answer. "You didn't break any bones, thanks to Nelly. You're badly shaken up, that's all. Don't try to talk."

She closed her eyes, but presently opened them on the same group.

"Am I keeping you all?" she murmured. When she opened them again, only the strange nurse was there. Mrs. Cawthorne considered her for a long time. "Just what did happen?" she asked in a stronger voice.

The nurse knew only that there had been a fall. She did not even know if Sarah had been told. Mrs. Cawthorne waited until she had gone to breakfast and Nelly had taken her place.

"Now, Nelly, tell me all about it—just what I did, and how you came to be there," she commanded in the comfortable voice of one who settles down to a good story, and Nelly, so lured, told of waking uneasy and stealing up the front stairs—since the door that led to the back stairs creaked; and then the scream, and her vain effort to make her own reassuring voice heard, and the wild fall that she had stopped.

"And if it was me that scared you, m'am, I'll never forgive myself," she said with trembling lips.

"Oh, you didn't," was the instant answer. "You hadn't anything in the world to do with it—except to save my crazy neck. And I will

forgive you for that if I can. Whom have you told about it?"

"Just Mr. Cawthorne, m'am. And when he went out to call up Miss Sarah, she had started for home."

Mrs. Cawthorne's look jumped to the clock. "She is on her way?" she exclaimed, so instantly excited that Nelly would have gone for the nurse; but Mrs. Cawthorne held her by a hand on her arm, thinking furiously.

"Sarah must not blame herself for being away," she worked it out. "She would, the dear girl, and she *must not*. Help me, Nelly—wait a minute. There, that's it. She doesn't have to know that I sent you away in the night. Let her think that you were right there, taking care of me, and that I ran amuck, and no one could have stopped it. That's it. Promise me."

"I'd promise you anything, Mrs. Cawthorne."

"Remember! Now send Mr. Cawthorne to me, alone."

Looking into the burning face, Nelly hesitated, but a sharp, "At once!" had to be obeyed. He must have been near, for he came immediately, looking oddly unfamiliar with unbrushed hair and blankly grave eyes. Mrs.

Cawthorne had no time then to consider him. She caught his wrist lest he should try to slip away for doctors and nurses before she had finished.

"Stephen, listen—listen with all your might. This is life and death. Sarah must not know that I had sent Nelly away—Sarah must not blame herself! Oh, don't you see that?" She shook his arm, but he could not seem to answer. "She is so loving, so responsible—if she blamed herself, she would never leave me again. And she must go, and go, and have lovely times. The hedge is down for Sarah! Oh, you can't smother her in it as you have smothered me!" He started, but she had only forgotten the difference between what one thinks and what one says. She went on without bitterness, as though he would understand and even sympathize. "Oh, how I hated it, hated it, hated it! Sometimes it was like a green snake wound tight about me—I used to play that when it got to my throat I could stop struggling and die. But I suppose you forgive even your shroud in time. I accept the hedge now—I accept you, Stephen—I accept everything but smothering Sarah! And I should be worse than the hedge,

I'd be a vampire, if I did that. You can't stop her now, and I won't. She has got out!"

"Lisa," he began helplessly, but she silenced him.

"No—wait. You have got to understand just what Sarah is to be told. Nelly went to bed in the next room—you understand that?"

"Yes."

"She was wide awake, looking after me—and I had a crazy fit, perhaps a bad dream. No one could have helped me or stopped me. Nelly did catch me before I was badly hurt. Now do you understand?"

He went through it in a dry voice, his eyes averted.

"You promise to stick to that? Swear it, Stephen. You are a bad old man, but you keep your word."

"I swear it, Lisa."

Her grasp relaxed and she seemed to sink down through the pillows to some place of perfect rest. When she again opened her eyes, Sarah was sitting close beside her. She smiled into the grave young face.

"Had a good time?" she murmured.

"Not good enough to pay for having left



you," Sarah said, with a sigh that was half a sob.

"You couldn't have helped it, dear! Didn't they tell you—?"

"Oh, yes; no one is to blame. But—!" Sarah laid her cheek on the limp hand. The gesture finished the sentence, it dedicated her youth to her mother's weakness.

Mrs. Cawthorne's lids dropped to hide her dismay. She was too weak to fight then, and yet the fight could not long be put off. Sarah must be free! All day the sentence beat on her sick brain. Toward night she was stronger and began to notice other things—that she was not for an instant left alone, that they did not allow her to lift her head or even her hand. When Doctor Russell came in, she sent away Sarah and the nurse and demanded the truth.

"Am I going to die?" she asked cheerfully, almost hopefully.

The doctor soothed, comforted and joked after the manner of his generation. She was good for twenty years yet; her heart had had something of a strain, but a few weeks of care and absolute obedience to orders would put her on her feet again. He became grave over that,

graver than she had ever seen him. Her docility must have no exceptions.

"But I couldn't be hired to stir or sit up; and I couldn't get anything you didn't prescribe if I wanted to," she objected.

"Oh, I know you!" His sigh was humorous. "I dare say you have seven nerve tonics and sleep producers and dear knows what under your pillow this moment."

She denied it, but looked a little guilty. "And if you do get me up, what then?" she asked. "Shall I just drag around, a bother to everybody?"

That was nonsense, of course. Oh, she would have to be careful—and he told a funny story of a man with heart trouble who had outlived all his grandchildren. There was nothing to worry about; she had a comfortable home and a devoted daughter. And she was not to say another word that night.

He went away, and for a long time she kept her eyelids down, so that no one knew what went on behind them—the selfless love and pity, the wild search for a way out. Suddenly she gave a little cry; then, hearing Sarah's quick response, she laughed.

"Nothing, dear. I just thought of something." When her eyes were unveiled, they had a look of shining peace that Sarah never forgot.

A night nurse came at nine o'clock, but, finding out that she had been up all day, Mrs. Cawthorne sent her to Sarah's room to get a few hours' rest.

"You can stay with me till you are sleepy, Bunny, and then wake her up," she said. "Take the big chair, darling, and presently I will try to sleep. . . . That's right. Isn't this cozy!" They smiled at each other. "Now tell me about your week. No matter if you have written me things—tell them to me all over again."

Sarah turned back to her gaieties with an effort. That last hour in Dosia's room had wiped the color out of vivid experiences; the week's campaign had become tawdry, even vulgar, in the light of what Dosia had admitted. Dosia was vulgar, too, and so was the commonplace luxury of her home, her obedient, commonplace family. Sarah had fled the moment breakfast was over, drawing the hedge about her like a fine lady's mantle. She did not want

to get out through Dosia's help! She did not even want Robert if Dosia could want him, too.

Had she come home to a tranquil household, by this time the ancient comfort would have been stirring in her side, and she would have healed herself by writing scenes of city gaiety, set in the radiance of life-as-it-ought-to-be. But this dreadful day had left the whole experience a heap of unsightly rubbish. She told what she could in a drowsy voice, hoping to soothe her mother to sleep. When she stopped, Mrs. Cawthorne rewarded her with a mother-sound of loving inattention. She was evidently off on some separate trail of thought, and, by the light in her face, it had led her to high peaks.

"You know, Bunny," she began, "when I die, you won't have to go through what so many daughters do — feeling that you didn't give enough, didn't show your love. You have always been just an utter joy to me—you've given heaped up and running over. Remember that."

"Mother!" Sarah begged, her eyes filling.

Mrs. Cawthorne smiled at her. "Was I harrowing? I didn't mean to be. One thinks of such things after an accident, I suppose. I

know, after my own mother's death—well, I had been a good and loving daughter, I am certain of that, just until that last year, when I was engaged to your father. I was madly in love, and, dearest, he wasn't a very easy man even to be engaged to. It was not a happy time, and I couldn't seem to bother about my mother. No one on earth mattered to me but Stephen. I ought to have pretended that she still mattered, but I forgot that until too late. For, in the middle of it all, she died—before I had a chance to wake up to her side of it. Oh, I don't blame myself. I suffered horribly then, but I know now that I couldn't have been different. And I had been warm and good until that year—truly. But that is where you are a bigger person than I was. If you were in love with three men, darling, you wouldn't grow cold to me."

Sarah was always fair. "I might if you weren't you," she said. "You would understand, and wait."

"I would never do a hurt mouth at you, or keep a grievance," Mrs. Cawthorne admitted gladly. "We know how to be a family, don't we? Now your father—Sarah, if I passed on,

I think he might have some really horrid moments."

"I hope so," was the vigorous answer. "But, mother, you are not allowed to talk."

"Well, I won't. But just one thing, dear: when I go, don't let that bad old man be too sorry." Her voice had a humorous tenderness. "A little sorry wouldn't hurt him, but don't let him suffer, darling. Of course, it looks unlikely, but he might. He couldn't help being himself, and I understood. Remember that, won't you?"

Sarah kissed her, but made no promise. Then she turned the light to a mere point and drew her chair away from the bed.

"They won't let me sit with you if I allow talking," she said. "Now not another word!"

"Not one!" was the contented assent.

She seemed to sleep very soon, and Sarah sat motionless, thinking of mothers and love and death. Beside such things, how unimportant and remote it all became—fame and parties and Dosia and even Robert! They were like a chapter in a book that she had finished. They had kept her feverishly awake all the night before, but now, when she tried to focus on



them, they became vague and floated out of reach. Even Robert—didn't matter—

She must have dozed for an instant, for it seemed to her as if her mother were bending over her; she seemed even to hear murmured words—"Good night, my little Sarah!" Yet that was impossible, for her mother was in bed, helpless. Sarah knew that for a fact. Her drowsy brain kept arguing about it until suddenly she was wide awake again, frightened at her lapse. She stood by the window for a few moments, to clear her brain, then seated herself rigidly upright. She did not mean to call the nurse before midnight, but presently the latter came in.

"I heard you moving and thought perhaps you were getting tired," she said. "I have had all the sleep I—" She broke off with an exclamation and turned up the light.

"You had better go," she said quickly, but Sarah came straight to her mother's side.

Mrs. Cawthorne lay just as she had arranged herself when Sarah turned down the light. Her sleep had never looked so tranquil. She who had so feared the little dark of night had gone to meet the great dark with a friendly smile, one hand flung out as though in welcome.

## XI

**D**OCTOR RUSSELL had known that at any moment the exhausted heart might stop. He would have made the best of a crippled life, but now he made the best of death, so that Sarah had to see it as a release, and could grieve only on her own account. The things her mother had said to her that last night—solemn things, though uttered so lightly—lived in her heart and filled it with a passion of gratitude. Except for poignant moments, she was not wholly unhappy—and not at all dreary, like the little gray man who limped silently out of his library to meals, and limped back again as soon as possible. Sarah looked on at her father with hard young eyes and made no effort to reach him. Probably he was only disturbed—annoyed at the change and embarrassed by its demand for emotion. She owed him nothing.

Robert came almost daily and was his best self, the self he showed in sick rooms, kind, strong, attentive; and Sarah sat opposite her young lord with a sad wonder growing in her eyes. She was grateful, full of affection and

appreciation, but she was also a little bored. After all these months of intimacy, they seemed scarcely acquainted. She had never really talked to him, never shown herself as she did to Saxe, and her listening had been an act of worship rather than of intelligence. Now her ears woke up and mortified her by their relentless report. His bodily beauty could still give her an ache, but it was an ache of regret for things gone by; and an evening with him began to seem very long.

No word whatever came from Saxe. It was incredible that he could remember a quarrel in the face of death. Her side of it was utterly forgotten, and she turned with longing to his deeply human understanding, the encompassing tenderness of his care for her; but there was not even a card of sympathy, though the mail rained them upon her from her new acquaintances. Mr. Cawthorne's position and Sarah's book had given the news prominence; no newspaper man could have missed it. And Saxe had not gone away, for every week his paper published a signed article on the political situation.

"Christopher, it isn't big, it isn't like you,"

she silently told him. "Even if you don't love me any more—and Dosia says they can get over it between one day and the next—you might at least be sorry. Ah, I did think you would come!" But four weeks passed and he made no sign.

And then Aunt Sadi's telegram opened a new world. She seldom wrote, but she had telegraphed reams since her sister-in-law's death. She and her brother were frankly hostile, but she had always taken an interest in "the family child," as she called Sarah.

"Arrive Hotel Potter Santa Barbara Thursday join me there for two weeks."

The message was like a strong hand at the needed moment, for the first exaltation of meeting death well was dying down, and the girl was growing miserably lonely. She told Nelly, and the cook, and even the laundress working in the big pleasant laundry with Lady Banksia roses framing the open door and windows. Then, at lunch time, she told her father, paying little attention to his reception of the news.

"Tell me about Aunt Sadi," she urged. "Of

course, I don't remember her visit, but I seem to remember a little white dog."

"Oh, yes; Sadi always gathers live stock; she can't stop a night without picking up some creature," he drawled. "She's a good woman, but I never l-l-liked her. She says just what she thinks in a strong voice, and they are always making her president of something. She has my fine features, but not my intellectual expression. Why do you want to go?"

A note of amusement was her only answer.

"Well, then," he amended, "what does she want of you?"

"Just to be kind and friendly, I suppose;" Sarah spoke in a lowered voice, and Mr. Cawthorne's eyes grew blank and fell away. He never voluntarily made reference to their sorrow, or mentioned his wife's name.

One beautiful thing left by that last evening with her mother was that Sarah did not feel guilty if she enjoyed anything. The next few days she kept telling her mother that she was almost happy, as though the hovering spirit would be glad of the reassurance. Robert took her to the train, burdening her with a mammoth box of chocolates, but his air of devotion

was growing a little mechanical. Perhaps the antennæ of his sensitive egotism had already discovered her secret inattention.

"You were dear to come all this way with me," she said earnestly as he stood beside her section for good-by.

"Oh, I was glad to. I will run up and see Dosia for a while." His eyes looked off over her head to some remote prospect. "Do you know, I haven't done that girl justice," he went on. "She is very sweet and womanly when one gets past a sort of worldly surface she puts on. You know what I mean?"

"I am sure I do," said Sarah with a faint sigh.

He took her hand for good-by, looking very handsome and chivalrous with his bared head, and other passengers watched them kindly. Sarah, catching a glimpse of this, sighed again, and wished that the text of real life would ever come up to the pictures.

It was good to get away from the shadowed house, from Robert, from the postman and the incessant wearing hope of a word from Saxe. The flight of the train to the south started up the old cry, "I'm getting out! I'm getting out!"



Sarah looked as though some great hand had opened a cage door when she stepped down from the sleeper into the morning sunshine.

She had been summoned for two weeks, but in a week she was racing back again, pushing the floor of the car to hurry it on, chafing at every stop as though it imperiled her good news. She kept telling her mother about it, and hearing her warm response. That had been one of the many splendid things about Aunt Sadi: she had said, "Your mother—" with no change of voice or expression, as though she were in the next room. That her mother should become a forbidden topic had been terrible to Sarah. Living or dead, she was a person to be glad of, not to shut away in cold silence. And Aunt Sadi had so perfectly understood her only brother. The usual decent reticences were never observed when relatives spoke of Mr. Cawthorne. Perhaps in his case no pretense was possible. Oh, it had been a human vitalizing week; and it was only the beginning. Sarah burst through the hedge as if she had run all the way home, and though old habit hushed her step before she reached the front door, her face was incandescent as she swung it back.

She had not sent word of her coming, and the silent unwelcoming house opened darkly before her. Her new joy could not cross its threshold, and for a frightened moment she wished that she had not come: that she had telegraphed her news and had her things sent. She had forgotten the life-long power of that closed library door over her spirit. And then, because she was afraid, she went swiftly forward and opened it.

Mr. Cawthorne sat in his usual place, but his head was dropped forward and his hands were folded in idleness. He looked horribly alone. Even when he lifted his head, his spirit did not instantly assert itself to deny the impression. His eyes blinked remotely.

"I believe I was asleep," he murmured, and then, "Oh, Sarah! Is that you? Came back, did you?"

"Just for a few days." Sarah was looking into his face with arrested attention. "Have you been ill?" she demanded.

He passed a hand over new lines and starting hollows as though to rub them out.

"Oh, no. I have lost the trick of sleeping, that is all. I can't seem to manage it at night."

He did not want to talk about that. "You look well. How's Sadi?"

"Oh, splendid! I am going back east with her, father, to stay a year. Perhaps longer. I came home to pack up."

Their eyes met and battled, though she did not know what his were saying behind their dull stare.

"You are?" he said at last.

"Yes. I am the live stock she has picked up on this trip." And Sarah laughed.

"You can leave R-R-Robert?"

The shadow that fell bleakly across her happiness was not Robert's, but Christopher's. And she must leave the place where Christopher was, if only to get away from the hurt of his silence and the agony of listening for him. Even in Santa Barbara, she had started at every sudden bell, and seen him in every long figure that approached.

"There is no one I can't leave," she said, as though for other ears. "I am so glad to go!"

"What will you do there?"

"Oh, live. And write. And make friends." Her going needed no defense, and yet she had to defend it. "You don't need me, and there is no

life for me here. I can't stand the hedge any longer, and there is no reason I should. Aunt Sadi's home is wide open, and there are dogs—oh, precious little dogs! And we have such good times together, she and I. We laugh, and we talk of mother, and she cares about my books—she had read *Dickery Dock* three times! We will travel together some day. Oh, it is like getting out of prison!" She piled up her indictment remorselessly, but he gave no sign of comprehension.

"I suppose you are asking my consent?" he observed.

"No. I am telling you," was the strong answer. "I leave here next Friday. We are going back to Montclair for two months, then to the Rocky Point cottage. I shall take everything, even some of my books. I suppose Nelly will stay on; she knows all your ways."

"Oh, don't trouble about me;" Mr. Cawthorne pulled his papers toward him as though he had been interrupted long enough.

"I want you to be comfortable," said Sarah politely, and left the room. Afterward she wished that she had not been quite so hard and horrid. He might deserve it, but he did look

rather forlorn. That first sight of him hurt every time she went back to it. The fun of collecting favorite books and turning out her desk was darkened.

Mr. Cawthorne did not seem aware that she had been horrid; that made it all the worse. Several times that day he appeared suddenly where she was working, asking her aimless questions and obviously not listening to her answers. At twilight she heard him at her door, and called out from her mother's room, where she was resting; but he would not come past the threshold.

"I was going to take a turn about the garden, but I suppose you are tired or busy or something," he said, his face turned away from the unchanged room.

"No, I'm not. I only dropped down for a moment."

Sarah rose from her mother's couch and went out with him, troubled and on guard. He made no attack, however. He talked about the weather and the state of the lawn, and about gardens he had seen in Italy in his youth, and presently she saw, with an unwilling, sickening compassion, that he was trying quite simply to

interest her. Her courteous soul could not refuse such an advance. She told him about gardens at Santa Barbara, and about excursions they had taken, and the wonders of the beach. No companionable silence was possible between them: they had to talk every moment, as though to deny that the situation held any complexities. When they went in, he wrung her heart by thanking her.

"I know you are busy. Very nice of you to spend so much time on a dull old party like me," he said gravely as he went back to his library. Sarah murmured some commonplace and fled.

"I won't be sorry!" she declared, safe in her own room. "He has brought it on himself—he has got to take his own consequences. Mother warned me—she was sorry, and it spoiled her life. I won't be, that's all. He isn't pathetic—he is a bad old man. Now I will write to Aunt Sadi." And yet she did not. She argued that she was tired, and that the letter could wait till morning.

She carried a book up to her own room that evening, but presently she heard her father's limping step, following. An absurd fright shook



her. The step seemed to come like some dreadful trailing fate, and the big house about her, dark and empty, offered no hiding-place. She might run screaming from room to room, but the slow inescapable step would follow. She sprang to her feet—but there was only an impotent little gray man hovering in the doorway, and she sank back ashamed of the melodrama her nerves had invented.

“Sairy, I wonder if you would martyrize yourself to the point of reading to me,” he said. “I have an idea that it might make me sleep. And if I don’t get back the trick of sleeping pretty soon— Any old thing. *Dotty Dimple* would do.”

Life-long habit made the request flattering. Sarah found a story and did her best by it, happy when at last she caught his wandering attention and held it. It would have been sweet, having him there beside her and ministering to him like any loved daughter, but for the need of self-protection.

“I am not going to be made sorry,” she vowed, and, as though her inner stiffening had ended the hour, he rose.

“That’s enough—you must be tired. I en-

joyed it. I dare say I can sleep now." At the door he paused. "Good of you to have come home before you went off altogether. I am glad you did it," he said with his back to her, and then the doors closed between them.

"Oh, I wish he wouldn't," Sarah muttered, tears of exasperation in her eyes. He had no right to make her sorry.

She could not sleep herself that night, and at last she gave up and lit the light to read. Two o'clock struck before she was ready to try sleep again. She had stretched up her hand to the light when a sound came from her father's room across the hall—the thud of a foot, and then the quick flinging back of his door. Sarah sprang to open her own door, and the sudden light caught him at his threshold, showing a face white and drawn.

"I heard her scream," he said. "Did you?" Then, as the sleep cleared from his eyes, he shrank back. "Dream, of course," he muttered. "I dream it every night. It is better to stay awake." And he closed the door between them.

In the morning Sarah went on with her uprooting, and still she did not write Aunt Sadi. She could have refuted any argument, tri-

umphed in any combat; but her father neither argued nor fought. He only came in search of her on thin pretexts, and lingered as if he had merely forgotten to go, and broke her heart by his labored attempts at conversation. All day, under her courteous response, she defied him: he was not going to make her sorry and so swallow her whole, as he had swallowed his wife. Then bed time came, and she saw dread of the night looking out of his dulled eyes so clearly that her kindness broke through and ran to him.

"Leave your door open to-night, dear;" she spoke as she might have to her mother. "I will leave mine open, too. You will sleep better, I know it."

He did not answer, perhaps could not. When, long afterward, he opened his door, she called, "Good night, father!" and still he did not speak, but she heard a sharp breath that pierced her last defense.

"Oh, poor old soul," she sobbed. "Oh, poor, lonely little old man!" The fight was over. She could not go.

Hours later she heard the distressed leap of the night before, and called out at once:

"It's all right, father. It's all right."

He answered this time. "Oh—oh, yes. Thank you, Sarah. All right."

He did not sleep after that. She could hear him turning and sighing. Finally she put on a wrapper and went in to him.

"Father, I am not going east now;" she rather flung it at him, for it was so wrong to give in! "Perhaps I can go later; but now I don't think I ought to leave you."

Speech came hard, but he did it. "Thank you, Sarah. I don't seem to be—just myself. I suppose it will be a big disappointment to you."

"Yes," said Sarah. "Very big. I am not staying because I think it is right—I don't; I think it is all wrong. You swallow our lives whole. But, if I went, I should not be happy. It would haunt me—you all alone in this empty house. Just as it did mother, when we tried to go to the city. She was sorry—and one can't stand being sorry. Nothing pays if it makes you sorry. I have fought it, but now it has got me, too." Sarah's voice was suddenly despairing. "I shall never get out. I give up. It is all over."

She went away, shaken and sorrowful, but at

peace, and, under it all, warmly, blessedly relieved—for Christopher Saxe might yet come! When she woke up, Mr. Cawthorne had gone to his classes at the University, and they met at lunch as though nothing intimate had passed between them. Sarah had telegraphed and written Aunt Sadi, and she spent the afternoon restoring her possessions to their places. The library door stood open, and whenever she passed she saw her father seated at his desk, pen in hand; but the pen did not move. It was almost too dark to sort books when he suddenly appeared beside her.

“Sarah, I am going to give you something, something very dear to me,” he said. “I want you to take it as a symbol of things I—can’t express.” He seemed to forget to go on, and she waited, seated on the floor among her books, looking up into his gray face.

“What is it?” she finally had to ask him.

“The hedge. You can have it. Cut it down—do anything you like.” She could not speak, and presently he went on. “She hated it. She said it had been like a green snake, choking her. . . . Death has a curious effect on the living . . . Stevenson speaks of the ‘im-



pure passion of remorse.' He was right, of course. It is impure—illogical. We do—and are—with our eyes open. Why be sorry for what was deliberate choice? And yet—death does something chemical, something more than logic warrants . . . Old superstition working in us, perhaps—grandmother weaknesses handed down . . . and still”—he looked straight at her for the first time—“we suffer. We suffer,” he repeated inaudibly.

Her heart wanted to cry out that she would not take it, that she cared only for his peace, but her brain judged better.

“I think it is right that you give it to me,” she said.

“Yes. And you may have more of the house. More—anything. I will not complain. You are a good girl, Sarah.”

She took his hand between both hers and spoke with her face hidden. “No, not very. I did not mean to tell you—one of the last things mother said. It was not to let you—suffer. She was merry about it—you know how she would be. She said, ‘Don’t let him really suffer. He couldn’t help it, and I understood.’”

She felt his hand tremble, but it was not



withdrawn. He sank down in the chair beside her, and for a long time they sat together in silence, father and daughter, as Sarah had dreamed they should be. She would never fear him again. She would take her rights—oh, even when she was so sorry that she did not want them! There should be justice between them; but also there would be love. She had so longed to love him all these years! And the clinging of his hand told her that now she might. His own hedge had been beaten down.

When he had left her she slipped out into the garden for a look at her old enemy, cutting blackly across the rose and gold of the western sky.

"It is your last night," she told it, and would have gone in search of the gardener to give the news but for a sudden memory. She had stood on that very spot on a day of high wind when Christopher Saxe had first come through the hedge, and she had made a promise: she was never to cut down the hedge without first telling him.

"I would come from Timbuctoo to save this last quiet spot," he had said. It was a serious promise. He had often referred to it. And

yet to approach him now, when he had left her without a word in her great sorrow, was very hard. Or, at least, Sarah pretended that it was. She would not acknowledge how outrageously glad she was of an excuse to break his silence.

The typewriter would be the coldest and most formal mode of communicating, and she ran up to the attic; but she had not been there for a long time, and she reckoned without its ghost. She had lit the lantern that hung from a beam and sat down at her dusty machine before she was aware of it; then the swinging light sent a shadow swinging up the wall, as though a long figure had risen from the camphor-wood chest to tower over her. And so the third great adventure of her life was upon her.

The dusky old cave was as resonant as a cathedral with a hidden organ. She sat motionless, her hands lying curled in her lap, her face lifted to the revelation. The dream, the pretty game, the crossing of looks and the touch of hands that she had called love, mattered no more than the treasures in the old chest. They were only the garments of love; she had found the living soul and body. Love was grave, like religion; fierce, like patriotism; silent and all-

giving, like maternity. It was so that she loved Christopher Saxe.

Nelly's coming with Christopher's name seemed the most natural thing in the world. Even his quick step on the stairs could not break in on her exaltation. She waited for him, grave eyes on the door, and did not remember to speak. To him she must have been only a shadow against the lantern. He did not speak, either, but when he came into the light she saw that he breathed as if he had been running, and though his lips were pressed tightly together, his chin trembled. It was the face of a man who has had an unbearable shock.

"Sarah, I didn't know;" the words had to tear their way out. "I have only—just this moment—heard. What have you—thought of me? Of course, you haven't thought at all—but I can't stand it, that I didn't know." He dropped down beside her, taking her hand in his and bending his face to it. She drew him closer, her other hand curled about his head. She had known, of course, that he had not heard; she had only pretended to doubt him.

He struggled on with his explanation. "I plunged off into the redwoods that week. You

see, your name had been in the papers—every day—till I couldn't bear it. You were so near, and yet going farther and farther away. I dropped everything, I tramped miles and miles, and slept in my blanket, and fought the thing out. When I came back I looked over the public news, but I didn't want to see—local things. And you going through all that—Sarah, I can't stand it. I would have come to you through anything—oh, I wish you could know that as I know it! I can not fear it." His tears were on her hand. She bent down until she could draw his head to her breast.

"I know," she said. "I know everything!"

In her compassion, he was only her hurt little boy; but a man's arms closed about her, and it was the face of a man, almost a strange man, that was lifted so close to hers. She shrank back with a frightened cry.

He released her at once and drew away, pulling up the nearest chair. It happened to be Sarah's first little rocker, but he obviously folded his long frame into it, intent only on reassuring her.

"Forgive me, dear," he said very quietly.

She knew that there was really nothing to

forgive, since she loved him like that, too, when she was alone. She could not bear to have him misunderstand.

"It is just that—I—haven't seen you for so long," she faltered, and that he might find out the truth in spite of her, she gave him a sorely shaken hand. He laid it up under his chin, evidently the heart's place for its dearest treasure, comforting and reassuring it until it relaxed and of its own accord turned to put its palm against his. He dropped his cheek to it, then his lips, but his eyes never left her bent head.

"How did you hear?" she asked.

He turned back to the bitter experience with a shiver. "I had come over to have an interview with the President of the University. They have offered me the Chair of Journalism—did you know that? Of course, my book did it. And it is exactly what I want—a chance to hammer at the coming journalists. We had settled everything when he said that the suggestion of me for the post had come from Mr. Cawthorne weeks ago, but that he had been prevented from taking it up again with him because of— Ah, my dear, my dear!" He had



to have her other hand, and the little chair was drawn closer. "For I know how you loved her. I ran here—I ran all the way."

"It isn't all sad, Christopher. Oh, there is so much to tell you!" She fell silent before it. "So you will live over here," she said presently.

He smiled at that. "May I come inside the hedge?"

It was the question her hands had already answered, but she could not meet it in words; she was not ready for all that must follow. She had to put him off.

"There won't be any hedge," she said. "My father has given it to me. He has abdicated, poor soul! I am going to cut it down."

"Ah, you wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't I!"

"But you made me a promise."

"Oh, yes. I was just going to write you about it—a very formal note on the typewriter."

"Ah, of course, you have thought me a dog! And yet"—his hands tightened on hers—"and yet—?" he repeated.

"Yes." Her face flamed. "You were right about Robert. That wasn't real love. That was just dreams."



"And when it went—?" he prompted.

She looked into his face, and it was no longer strange. "Ah, then I loved you," she said with an impulsive motion toward him.

He rose up as his shadow had risen up the wall. He drew her to her feet, then lifted her from them to hold her tight against his breast, his head dropped against hers. But he set her down, very gently, before he kissed her.

\* \* \*

"You really want the hedge, Christopher?"

They sat on the camphor-wood chest, just outside the circle of lantern-light, with Sarah's crib on one side of them and her dolls' house on the other.

"Ah, I have been beaten on by noise until it seems like Paradise in here."

"But it is ugly, it's grim!"

"We would beautify it. Make the entrance twice as wide and plant blooming, inviting things there, and train vines to grow up on it, and spill a little of the garden outside. Trust me. I will make it a dream of loveliness. You don't really want it to go?"

She looked into her heart and made the eternal discovery. "Not if you want it to stay."

The discovery went on and on until it brought her, shining, to the very heart of the miracle.

"I have got out! Christopher, I'm out!"

He kissed her for it. "You poor darling, you are in for life, you mean," he said ruefully.

"No. Where you are, that is being out. That is the whole world—that is life and love and people! I'm out! Oh, this is all I want—you may have the hedge. But our children, Christopher—" She faltered, as if she might turn shy, but his natural assent carried her on again:

"Yes, dear—our children?"

"It won't be enough for them. They shall not be shut in as I was. Even if it disturbs us, they must have their lives. Promise it, Christopher—happy lives, like other children—parties and playmates!"

"Parties and playmates," he promised them gravely, and sealed the vow.

THE END









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